

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



February 2015

Vol. 120, No. 2

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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Man's Inherent Divinity*

Many years ago, I visited a great sage of our own country, a very holy man. We talked of our revealed book, the Vedas, of your Bible, of the Koran, and of revealed books in general. At the close of our talk, this good man asked me to go to the table and take up a book; it was a book which, among other things, contained a forecast of the rainfall during the year. The sage said, 'Read that.' And I read out the quantity of rain that was to fall. He said, 'Now take the book and squeeze it.' I did so and he said, 'Why, my boy, not a drop of water comes out. Until the water comes out, it is all book, book. So until your religion makes your realise God, it is useless. He who only studies book for religion reminds one of the fable of the ass which carried a heavy load of sugar on its back, but did not know the sweetness of it.' Shall we advise men to kneel down and cry, 'O miserable sinners that we are!' No, rather let us remind them of their divine nature. I will tell you a story. A lioness in search of prey came upon a flock of sheep, and as she jumped at one of them, she gave birth to a cub and died on the spot. The young lion was brought up in the flock, ate grass, and bleated like a sheep, and it never knew that it was a lion. One day a lion came across the flock and was astonished to see in it a huge lion eating grass and bleating like a sheep. At his sight



the flock fled and the lion-sheep with them. But the lion watched his opportunity and one day found the lion-sheep asleep. He woke him up and said, 'You are a lion.' The other said, 'No,' and began to bleat like a sheep. But the stranger lion took him to a lake and asked him to look in the water at his own image and see if it did not resemble him, the stranger lion. He looked and acknowledged that it did. Then the stranger lion began to roar and asked him to do the same. The lion sheep tried his voice and was soon roaring as grandly as the other. And he was a sheep no longer. My friends, I would like to tell you all that you are mighty as lions. If the room is dark, do you go about beating your chest and crying, 'It is dark, dark, dark!' No, the only way to get the light is to stike a light, and the darkness goes. The only way to realise the light above you is to strike the spiritual light within you, and the darkness of sin and impurity will flee away. Think of your higher self, not of your lower".

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From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,  
(Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 1.336-37.

**Vol. 120, No. 2**  
**February 2015**

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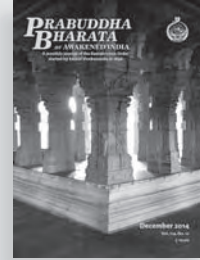


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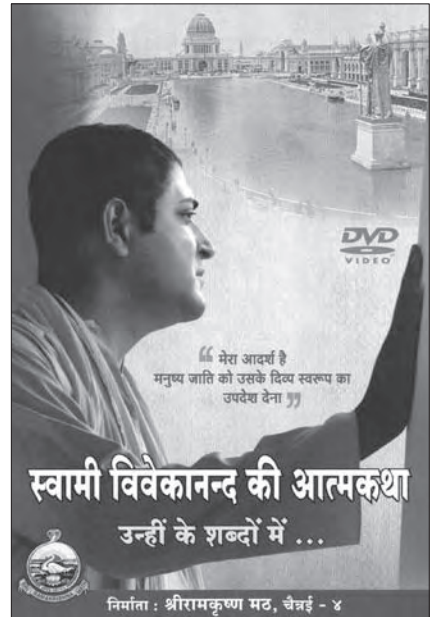
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**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

February 2015  
Vol. 120, No. 2

### मैत्रायणीय उपनिषत्

सर्वं चेदं क्षयिष्णु पश्यामो यथेमे दंश-मशकादयस्-तृण-वनस्पतयोद्धूत-प्रध्वंसिनः । अथ किमेतैर्वा परेऽन्ये महा-धनुर्धराश्-चक्रवर्तिनः केचित् । सुद्युम्न-भूरिद्युम्नेन्द्रद्युम्न-कुवलययाश्च-यौवनाश्च-वद्ध्रियाश्चाश्वपतिः शशबिन्दु-ह्रिश्चन्द्रोऽम्बरीष ननक्तु-सर्याति-ययात्यनरण्योक्षसेनादयः । अथ मरुत-भरत-प्रभृतयो राजानः । मिषतो बन्धु-वर्गस्य महतीं श्रियं त्यक्त्वास्माल्लोकादमुं लोकं प्रयाता इति । अथ किमेतैर्वा परेऽन्ये गन्धर्वासुर-यक्ष-राक्षस-भूत-गण-पिशाचोरग-ग्रहादीनां निरोधं पश्यामः

॥१.४॥

*Sarvam chedam kshayishnu pashyamo yatheme damsha-mashakadayas-trina-  
vanaspatayodbbhuta-pradhvamsinah. Atha kimetairva pare'nye maha-dhanurdharash-  
chakravartinah kechit. Sudyumna-bhuridyumnendradyumna-kuvalayashva-yauvanashva-  
vaddhriyashvashvapatih shashabindur-harishchandro'mbarisha nanaktu-saryati-  
yayatyanaranyokshhasenadayah. Atha marutta-bharata-prabhritayo rajanah. Mishato bandhu-  
vargasya mahatim shriyam tyaktvasmallokadamum lokam prayata iti. Atha kimetairva pare'nye  
gandharvasura-yaksha-rakshasa-bhuta-gana-pishachoraga-grahadinam nirodham pashyamah.*

(1.4)

And we see the whole universe perishing like these gnats, mosquitoes, and the like, and the grass and trees that grow and perish. But what of these? There are others who are superior. Some mighty archers and emperors like Sudyumna, Bhuridyumna, Indradyumna, Kuvalayashva, Yauvanashva, Vaddhriyashva, Ashvapati, Shashabindu, Harishchandra, Ambarisha, Nanaktu, Saryati, Yayati, Anaranya, Ukshasena, and others. And other kings like Marutta and Bharata. With all their kith and kin looking on, they have left their great glory and have gone from this world into the next. But what of these? There are others who are superior. We also see the destruction of celestial artists, demons, spirits, ogres, ghosts, demigods, goblins, snakes, and imps that seize children.

(1.4)

# THIS MONTH

There is a distinction between the human being and other living beings. What is that makes a living being a human being? Does someone become a human being merely by birth or is there more to it? An attempt to answer these questions is made in **Becoming Human**.

Swami Vivekananda used many monastic names as found in his letters. When did he take the name Swami Vivekananda? Did he take it himself or did someone give it to him? These have remained a mystery for a long time now. In **Tracing the Name 'Vivekananda'**, Swami Videhatmananda, former editor of the Hindi journal of the Ramakrishna Order, *Viveka Jyoti*, tries to unravel this mystery through an in-depth analysis of the existing literature. In doing so, he evaluates the opinions of other scholars on this subject.

What are mantras? How to understand them and what is their function? Damon F Lynch, a doctoral student of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, embarks on an elaborate study of the various aspects of mantras in **Ways of Knowing Mantras**.

In **The Brain and Holistic Living**, Gopal C Bhar, honorary Professor of physics at the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, tries to find the correlation of the brain and the heart in our lives by understanding their roles in influencing our behaviour. The author concludes that a synergy of both these organs is necessary for holistic living.

The dance of Shiva is considered to be a dance with a cosmic significance. While some say that it is a dance of destruction, others believe that

it upholds the rhythm of the universe. In **The Eternal Dance of Shiva**, Swami Kritarthananda, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, gives us fresh insights into the dance of Shiva. He juxtaposes the traditional thought with appropriate parallels from the scientific world. He also shows that many scientists have compared the dance of Shiva to the rhythmic cosmic order.

The World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 was an occasion that brought together different religious doctrines. In the first instalment of **Virchand Raghavji Gandhi: An Indian Spokesman and Jain Scholar**, Dr Satish K Kapoor, a former British Council scholar and registrar of Dayanand Anglo-Vedic University, Jalandhar, tells us how Virchand Gandhi presented the tenets of Jainism to the world at this Parliament and how he went on to do pioneering work of propagating Jainism to the world at large.

In the third instalment of **Memory**, Swami Satyamayananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur, talks about the complexity of the structure of memory, its functioning and how it processes different sensory inputs. He also dwells on the evolution of the study of mind in different Eastern and Western traditions.

The religious and spiritual world is witnessing a novel phenomenon in the rise of a new band of people professing to be 'spiritual but not religious'. Who are they and what are their beliefs? These and many related questions are examined by Courtney Bender in her book **The New Metaphysicals**, from which we bring you this month's *Manana*.



# Becoming Human

Who is a human being? Does just being a member of the species *Homo sapiens* make one human? Or is there a process of unfoldment into the special life of a human being? To find an answer to these questions, we need to understand how the human being is unique. Only humans can conceive of a reality beyond their body and mind. They can philosophise and find deeper meanings in seemingly meaningless phenomena. They can aspire to transcend their physical limitations by accentuating the non-physical or spiritual in them. They have the ability to feel, like no other species, emotions like love, anger, hatred, jealousy, and patriotism. The non-physical inspires the physical in the human being. To become human one needs to develop the intuition to connect to and understand the subtle.

Every living being becomes one of its species by birth. A cat is born a cat; a dog is born a dog. Not so the human being. Birth does not automatically make a person human. Though biology would accept an offspring of a human being to be a human being by birth, becoming human is much more than acquiring a specific morphology and anatomy. Every human offspring needs to become human by consciously developing the quality of being human.

The human being thinks in a unique manner. Humans think beyond what is apparent and try to see beneath the veneer. Only human beings can enter into deeper realms of contemplation, which enables one to perceive that which goes unperceived by most beings. They can put hidden meanings into symbols. Such

symbols could form themselves into languages, patterns, or codes. Human beings can create cultures, evolved from practices of specific groups in certain regions. Bonding within groups in a very complex yet systematic manner leads to the development of social and cultural mores that can be transmitted over generations of offspring.

---

**Birth does not automatically make a person human. Every human offspring needs to consciously become human.**

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The ability to stand erect is a distinct feature of the human species. Is Nature asking humans to stand up for what is right? There are too many people who live a jelly-fish existence not having the courage to question the many injustices perpetrated on them or near them. Such people do not deserve a spinal cord because they have long forgotten the art of standing erect. One can stand erect only if there is an ideal in life. Having an ideal is another unique feature of the human being. One who has an ideal has something to live up to. Every action is tested against this benchmark. Every human needs an ideal that gives purpose to life.

All life forms struggle for food, shelter, and progeny. Restricting us to these basic instincts or considering them to be all that is important in life does not make us human. Such a tendency just makes us closer to those creatures, names of which are swear words for humans. The struggle for the basic physical needs makes one hold on to the smallest morsel available. Want is all that becomes important in life. To become a human being one should

learn how not to want. One should excel in the art of resisting wants and better still, denying needs. While living beings like the dog would jump on the bone in sight, the human being has the capacity of discernment, which brings restraint.

Disturbing events in society today bring home the fact that we have failed to become human beings and are merely members of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Why should a woman be assaulted just because she appears attractive? Why should someone take away some object, just because it is lying without an owner? Why should a vacant plot of land with no fence lure one to encroach it? Why should one commit an offence the moment surveillance cameras go off in a power blackout? Many animals do not eat when not hungry, do not copulate out of cycle, and do not encroach upon others' territory. Have we humans become worse than them? For many humans food has stopped being a necessity; they fill their bellies mainly to satisfy their tongues. Many accumulate wealth just for the sake of accumulation.


Strange though it may seem, human beings are probably the only living beings who contemplate death. Death is not just an accident, but for many it is an event for which they have prepared for during a lifetime. Humans hope for a pain-free death, they wish for a later death, and have developed meditations and rituals concerning death. Death has provoked us to look for an eternity that would assure of our staying past our physical bodies. And so, to become human we have to be conscious of our death.

To be human also means to have the ability to laugh at oneself. While science has discovered the presence of sense of humour in many species, it is probably only the human being that can laugh at one's own follies. Abnegation of the ego is a human virtue that is shown to us by Nature through this ability. Only the human being has explored into the farthest reaches of the universe, has dwindled

itself, and perhaps also become frightened by the unknown dangers lurking in the uncharted territories beyond the earth. To become human we have to continuously explore and learn, even if that learning were to cause unrest in us.

It is only the human being that has developed standards of politeness and courtesy. To become human one has to acquire the art of foregoing comforts for the sake of the other person. One reins in the tongue, controls the limbs, pacifies the stomach, and directs one in such manner as to conform to the sensibilities of others in a group. The willingness to act so makes us human. Reasoning is a human trait but it becomes more humane when combined with feelings and sensibilities. To become human is to venture to strike a balance between reason and emotion, to bring harmony between the head and the heart.

The human being is the most self-reflexive being on the planet. Whatever happens to or is done by a human being is almost instantly related to oneself. This constant going back to one's personality leads to a chain of questions and answers, an unbroken stream of cogitations, revealing problems behind the serene exterior, and leading one into a quagmire of conflicts. Every inner conflict is the precursor to an awakening. Innumerable extremes in the human psyche necessitate the quest for balance. To become human one has to strive to maintain health, both physical and mental. It is doubtful whether there is any animal species, which is concerned so much about one's own health.

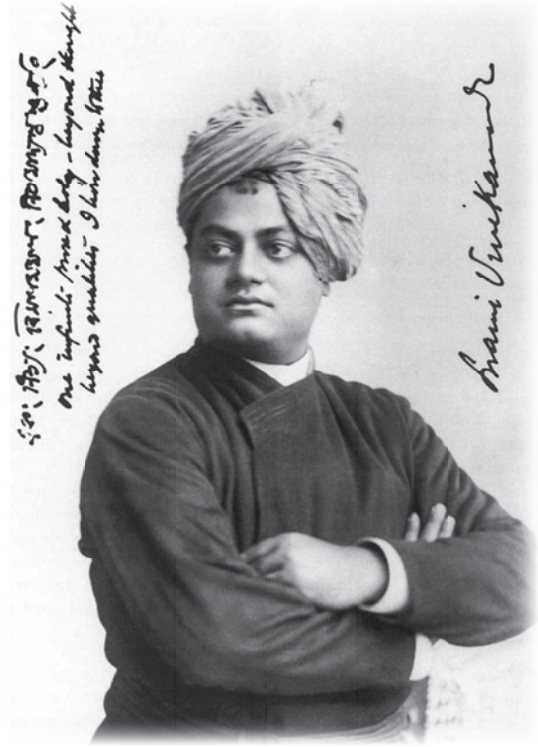
To be a human being is glorious. And one should be aware of this glory. It is the constant awareness of one's glory, evolution, and the special manifestation of consciousness that helps a human to remain a human. This will check one from falling onto the non-human plane. Else there will be not much difference between us and the brutes. Worse, many of us would turn into brutes and start fighting with one another. 

# Tracing the Name 'Vivekananda'

Swami Videhatmananda

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA WAS CALLED 'Vireshvar' or 'Biley' in his childhood as he was born as a result of special religious vows to Lord Vireshvar Shiva of Varanasi. His mother used to call him 'Bilu.' His formal name was 'Narendranath' and his younger brothers were named 'Mahendranath' and 'Bhupendranath'. Sri Ramakrishna used to affectionately call Swamiji 'Naren' or 'Loren' when stammering. Later, during Swamiji's travels he first took the name 'Vividishananda' and still later took the names 'Vivekananda' and 'Satchidananda'.

But there is some lack of clarity as to when Swamiji, who became world famous as 'Vivekananda', first adopted this name—nothing can be said definitely about it even till today. Even the brother disciples of Swamiji and his close disciples such as Alasinga Perumal and others were not aware about the origin of his name. We see that at a later date, Alasinga in a letter dated 23 June 1896 addressed to the editor of a Boston-based newspaper named 'Sunday News Tribune' wrote: 'Swami Vivekananda is a name ... given to him ... by his great guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.'<sup>1</sup> The reason for these erroneous impressions about his name is the lack of details about his early monastic life till the year 1893 when he became famous. Also, he had practically stopped correspondence with his brother disciples as well as with his acquaintances during his travels to Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and South India. Therefore, conclusions have to be drawn after analysing whatever little information about this period is available.



The earliest biography of Swamiji, compiled by his brother disciples and his own disciples and published in 1913 states that Swamiji 'was known by the name "Vivekananda" only shortly before leaving for the West. Prior to that he had changed his name several times, indeed, as often as he had found it necessary to avoid recognition and publicity. Now he was known as "Vividishananda", now as "Sachchidananda", and so on. It is said that he finally assumed the name Vivekananda at the earnest entreaty of the Rajah of Khetri.'<sup>2</sup>

Monsieur Romain Rolland—a French philosopher and a recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature and an important biographer of Swamiji—had entered into a correspondence with Swami Ashokananda, the then editor of

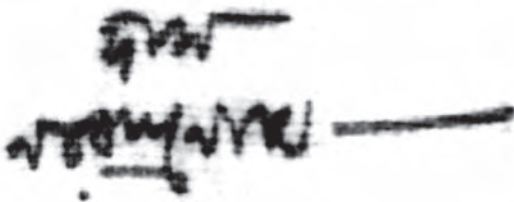
*Prabuddha Bharata*, about Swamiji's name. Consequently, Swami Ashokananda made enquiries about it.

After going through available material regarding Swamiji's name, Swami Ashokananda sent the gist of the information to Romain Rolland, based on which he wrote in his biography of Swamiji:

I would remind the reader that his real name was Narendranath Dutt. He did not adopt the name Vivekananda until the moment of his departure for America in 1893.

I have consulted the Ramakrishna Mission on this subject. Swami Ashokananda has been good enough to put at my disposal all the results of a profound research. According to the decisive witness of one of Vivekananda's most important monastic disciples, the Swami Shuddhananda, the present Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Ramakrishna always used his name Narendra, or more shortly, Naren. Although he had made Sannyasins of certain of his disciples, it was never according to the usual forms and he never gave them monastic names. He had indeed given Naren the cognomen of *Kamalāksha* (lotus-eyed), but Naren dropped it immediately. During his first journeys in India he appeared under different names, in order to conceal his identity. Sometimes he was the Swami Vividishananda, sometimes Satchidananda. Again on the eve of his departure for America, when he went to ask Colonel Olcott, then President of the Theosophical Society, for letters of introduction to America, it was under the name Satchidananda that Colonel Olcott knew him, and,

*Swamiji's signature as 'Dutt Narendranath' in the letter to Pramadas Mitra dated 12.08.1888*



instead of recommending him to his friends in America, warned them against him. It was his great friend, the Maharaja of Khetri, who suggested the name Vivekananda to him when he was about to go to America. The choice of the name was inspired by an allusion to the 'power of discrimination' possessed by the Swami. Naren accepted it, perhaps provisionally, but he could never have changed it, even if he had wanted to, for within a few months it had acquired an Indo-American celebrity.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Names of the Other Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna***

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, some of his monastic disciples went to Antpur in 1886, where they took vows of renunciation before a sacred fire. Later they realised that it was Christmas Eve. In the third week of January 1887 eight brother disciples performed the Viraja Homa and took formal monastic vows and put on saffron clothes received earlier from Sri Ramakrishna. On that day Swamiji gave them the names Brahmananda, Premananda, Ramakrishnananda, Saradananda, Niranjanananda, Abhedananda, and Trigunatitananda. After a few days two other brother disciples took formal vows of renunciation in a similar manner and took the names Shivananda and Advaitananda. Latu and Yogin had gone to Vrindavan and on return they took the names Adbhutananda and Yogananda. In the same year Harinath got the name Turiyananda and after returning from Tibet, Gangadhar took the name Akhandananda in July 1890. No details are available about Swami Subodhananda's monastic vows. Hariprasanna took monastic vows in 1898 and took the name Vijnanananda. Thus Swamiji had given names to his fifteen brother disciples, but whether he himself took a monastic name in 1887? If he did, what was that name? We do not know anything definite about this.



### The History of the Name 'Vividishananda'

Swami Shivananda, in his letter dated 25 June 1928 to Swami Ashokananda, apart from other facts, also mentioned that Swamiji used to introduce himself as 'Vividishananda' during his stay at Baranagore Math. It would be logical to assume that Swamiji took the name 'Vividishananda' whenever necessary during his initial wanderings. From his letters written to Pramadadas Mitra of Varanasi and from his attempts to meet Pavahari Baba, it appears that at that time he had strong *vividisha*, thirst for knowledge.

That Swamiji did not take his monastic vows along with his brother disciples on the day Viraja Homa was performed and that he took it later inconspicuously is also confirmed by another letter. After his return from Tibet in 1890, when Swami Akhandananda enquired about the names given to his brother disciples, Swami Shivananda wrote from Baranagore Math in his letter dated 4 January 1890: 'You wanted to know our monastic names. They are given below; but do not use these names in the addresses of letters: Niranjan—Niranjanananda Swami, Yogen—Yogananda Swami, Baburam—Premananda Swami, Latu—Adbhutananda Swami, Shashi—Ramakrishnananda Swami, Haribabu—Turiyananda Swami, Tulasi—Nirmalananda Swami, Daksha—Jnanananda Swami, Kali—Abhedananda Swami, and Gopaldada—Advaitananda Swami.'<sup>4</sup>

The letter was signed as Shivananda. But it is surprising that the names of Swamis Brahmananda, Saradananda, and Trigunatitananda are missing from this list. It is quite possible that Swamiji had not taken any name till that time or even if he had, he had not revealed it to anyone. An ongoing lawsuit regarding his ancestral house could have been the reason for his being

Swamiji's signature as 'Narendra' in the letter to  
Saradananda dated 06.07.1890

silent about his monastic vows. The brother disciples used to address each other by their pre-monastic names and there was no practical need for the monastic names.<sup>5</sup> Swami Ekatmananda writes: 'It is most likely that the name "Vivek" by which Keshab Chandra Sen used to address him, as stated by no less a person than the reputed scholar Dr Kshiti Mohan Sen, must have been very prominent in the mind of Narendranath when the time came for assuming a new name after the Sannyasa ritual, and hence he took for himself quietly the now-famous name of "Vivekananda".'<sup>6</sup>

### Use of the Name 'Satchidananda'

The most authentic testimonies about the names used by Swamiji are the letters written by him in his wandering days. We find from *Patravali*, the Bengali edition of the letters of Swami Vivekananda, that he had signed fifty-two letters written from 1888 to June 1890 as 'Narendra' or 'Narendranath'. In the letters exchanged amongst his brother disciples in that period, we find Swamiji being referred to as 'Narendra Babaji'. In ten letters bearing numbers fifty-three to sixty-two addressed to Swami Saradananda, Gobinda Sahay of Alwar, Haridas Viharidas Desai of Junagadh, and Pandit Shankarlal of Khetri, Swamiji's signature was either 'Vivekananda' or simply 'V'. After this, in a letter written

Swamiji's signature as 'Sachitananda' in the letter to  
Raja Ajit Singh of Khetri dated 15.02.1893

in November 1892—mentioned as 1893 by mistake—from Madgaon, Goa, we notice his signature ‘Satchidananda’ for the first time. In this letter and in the eight letters and the two letters received from Khetri in 1999, all written before he left for America, we find the name ‘Vivekananda’ mentioned in five letters and the name ‘Satchidananda’ mentioned in another six letters. Out of these letters, three were written to the Diwan Saheb of Junagadh, one was written to Haripada Mitra, one was written to Indumati Mitra of Belgaum, four were written to the devotees of Madras, and two letters were written to Ajit Singh, Raja of Khetri.

It is amusing that Swamiji would sign his letters to the devotees of Belgaum or Madras as ‘Satchidananda’ and his letters to friends in Khetri or Junagadh as ‘Vivekananda’. From this

*Raja Ajit Singh of Khetri on 18 June 1897 in London*



one can conclude that Swamiji would use a name that the addressee was familiar with. However, the letter to Raja of Khetri dated 15 February 1893 from Madras was an exception, as he had signed it ‘Satchidananda’.

Some writers have pointed out the possibility that when Swamiji left for the Himalayas with his brother disciple Swami Akhandananda in July 1890, he had by then assumed the name ‘Vividishananda’. Some others opine that when he departed alone from Delhi for Rajasthan after bidding farewell to his brother disciples, he assumed the name ‘Vivekananda’ instead of ‘Vividishananda’ to conceal his whereabouts from his brother disciples. Swami Akhandananda had challenged Swamiji: ‘Even if you go to Patal [the nether regions], I shall hunt you out.’<sup>7</sup> After meeting Swami Trigunatitananda in Porbandar and Swami Abhedananda in Junagadh, Swamiji had again changed his name back to ‘Satchidananda’ probably to conceal his identity and it appeared that he was known only as ‘Satchidananda’ in some places in Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

### ***Use of the Name ‘Vivekananda’ in Letters to the Diwan of Junagadh***

Thus the brother disciples of Swamiji and his important biographers had accepted that sometime before he went to the US he had assumed the name in Khetri sometime in April-May 1893. Later some letters written by him in 1891, which were addressed to Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Diwan of Junagadh, were traced, in which he had signed as ‘Vivekananda’.<sup>8</sup> So, he was using this name at least one year before his departure for America. In this context Shankari Prasad Basu writes: ‘Swamiji signed his letter dated 26 April 1892 addressed to Haridas Viharidas as “Bibekananda” while he signed his letter

dated 15 June 1892 as "Vivekananda"; while in a letter dated 22 August 1892 he again signed as "Bibekananda". It can be inferred from such repeated changes in signature that Swamiji had just started using this name.<sup>9</sup> Earlier Swamiji had signed his letter written to Diwan Haridas Viharidas either in February or March from Girnar Hills as 'Bibekananda'.

### **Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma's View**

There is an entry 'A monk named Vivekananda' from the very first day of the Waqyat Register of Khetri.<sup>10</sup> The person who made the notings in the Waqyat Register could not have been a big scholar. It was quite possible that Maharaja had seen the name 'Vividishananda' written incorrectly in the papers and had, for that reason, conceived the idea of putting the proposal before Swamiji.

Explaining the reasons for the recording of the name 'Vivekananda' in the Waqyat Register of Khetri from the very first day, the famous researcher Sri Benishankar Sharma writes:

One important point needs proper clarification. The *Waqyat Register* of Khetri Raj, as we have seen, refers to the Swami as 'Vivekananda', a name which he, in fact assumed only later on. On enquiries we learnt from the State historians that the usual practice with the *Waqyat Navises* was to jot down the day-to-day happenings in sheets of loose papers. These used to be fair-copied subsequently after an interval of one or two years and were, at the time, duly approved by the Raja. In fact, originally the Swami was mentioned in the draft copy of the Register only as a *Sannyasin* and this was at a later day, changed into 'Swami Vivekananda' (43-4).

Swami Shivananda and Swami Akhandananda, brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda, and one of his foremost disciple, Swami Shuddhananda are considered to be one of the earliest members of the Ramakrishna Math. Of



Swamiji's signature as 'Bibekananda' in the letter to Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 26.04.1892

them, Swami Akhandananda and Swami Shuddhananda had themselves gone to Khetri and stayed there for some time. Hence their view, as learnt during their stay there, that Swamiji had assumed the name 'Vivekananda' before leaving for the US and at the request of Raja of Khetri, appears reasonable. The only question that remains is how many days before his departure to the US did Swamiji take the name 'Vivekananda'? We get an answer to this question from Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma who believes that it was about one and a half year before Swamiji set out for the US.

Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma wrote in his Hindi book *Khetri Naresb and Vivekananda* published in 1927:

Very few people might be knowing that Swamiji's well-known name Vivekananda was given by Rajaji Bahadur. Prior to this Swamiji used to write his name as Vividishananda. This is also proved from his old letters. In his first journey to Khetri, Swamiji was sitting one day with Rajaji. Jokingly he remarked: 'Swamiji, your name is rather difficult. Without a commentator it is not possible for an ordinary man to understand its meaning or implication. Nor is it easy to pronounce. Besides, your Vividisha Kal, that is to say, the period within which one tries to know things is also over.

On hearing the Raja's logical argument, the Swami inquired, 'Maharaja, what name would you like?'

Rajaji said: 'In my opinion, the proper name for you is "Vivekananda"'. And the Swami from that day onward began to use the name Vivekananda for himself (48).

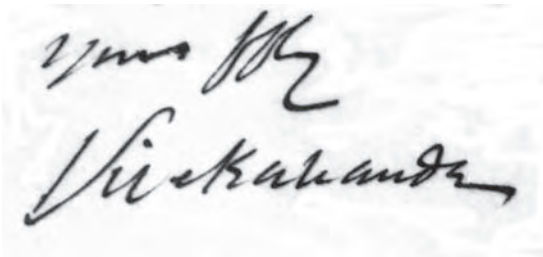
Benishankar Sharma writes further: ‘This incident was narrated to the above writer by Munshi Jagmohanlal, who was present when the conversation reproduced above took place and who was alive when Panditji wrote his book. Besides the contents of the book as stated above have been confirmed by Swami Akhandananda, the foremost Gurubhai and follower of Swami Vivekananda, who wrote its preface after studying the manuscript’ (ibid.).

A copy of a letter by Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma in his own handwriting, to Benishankar Sharma is preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, where he says that it was Munshi Jagmohanlal, the private secretary to the Raja of Khetri, who arranged his meeting with Swamiji. Munshi Jagmohanlal was also the witness to the discussion about the difficulty of Swamiji’s name ‘Vividishananda’. In that letter he has also written that Munshi Jagmohanlal believed that this discussion took place in Mount Abu.<sup>11</sup>

### Counter Views

Swami Gambhirananda concludes that ‘after using the name ‘Vividishananda’ for some time, he gave it up and took the name “Vivekananda”. Later, although he never abandoned the name “Vivekananda”, he was using the name “Satchidananda”. And finally before sailing for America he took the name “Vivekananda” permanently and became world-renowned by this very name.’<sup>12</sup>

*Swamiji’s signature as ‘Vivekananda’ in the letter to Haridas Viharidas Desai dated 15.06.1892*



Swami Someswarananda also has a different opinion and he concludes that ‘during his tour in the southern part of India sometimes Swamiji was carrying a letter of introduction and sometimes was introduced by some one. So we can take it for granted that during these visits, he could have used only one consistent name. ... we can conclude that Swamiji used the name “Satchidānanda” during his tour in western and southern India.’<sup>13</sup> However, since we have the possession of many letters written during this period in the archives at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, and these letters have different names, the line of argument of Someswarananda becomes invalid.


Swami Abhedananda states in his autobiography that during the Viraja Homa in the third week of January 1890 in Baranagore Math, ‘Narendranath assumed the name of “Vividishananda”’<sup>14</sup> However, this cannot be taken as authentic as Swami Abhedananda’s autobiography was published in 1964—many years after his demise—based on some notes written by him some years before his passing. By then, he was well distanced from the events in question and his memory was failing. Swami Prajnanananda writes in the introduction to the original Bengali edition of the autobiography: ‘In the beginning of 1933, he showed us the initial parts of this autobiography and asked some persons to make copies.’<sup>15</sup> Hence, we can take only such information from Swami Abhedananda’s autobiography that does not contradict other sources. In the present case, we cannot hold this evidence as valid.

### Conclusion

While returning from Madras in 1893 and before meeting Raja of Khetri again, Swamiji had purchased a ticket after alighting at Mumbai. Munshi Jagmohanlal had accompanied him for the reservation of the ticket and most probably had



filled up the form. He used to know Swamiji only as 'Vivekananda' and so did the ticketing in that name. Had Swamiji left by chance for the US from Madras, then it was possible that he would have become world famous by the name 'Satchidananda'. It should be remembered that Swamiji had signed the letter written to Raja Ajit Singh from Madras on 15 February 1893 as 'Satchidananda'.

Due to lack of appropriate documents and evidences, some people have guessed that Swamiji might have taken the name 'Vivekananda' in 1887 at Baranagore Math or while parting company with his brother disciples. However, now due to the availability of fresh evidence and upon its analysis, we may conclude that some time after meeting the Raja of Khetri on 4 July 1891, Swamiji took the name 'Vivekananda'. Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma was quite close to Munshi Jagmohanlal and he had heard from him many things related to Swamiji. His evidence and other facts point to this very conclusion. If any authentic document or letter having the name Vivekananda before this date is discovered, only then would it be proper to change this view. Otherwise it would be logical to accept that Swamiji had assumed the name 'Vivekananda' at the request of the Raja of Khetri sometime after getting acquainted with him at Mount Abu in the month of June 1891 or a few months later at Khetri. 

Swamiji's signature as 'Vivekananda' in the Devanagari script



## Notes and References

1. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), 4.544.
2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 3 vols (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1913), 2.258.
3. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and*

*the Universal Gospel*, trans. E F Malcom-Smith (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), 5.

4. *Mahapurushjir Patravali* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 1387 BE), 5-6.
5. According to Swami Ekatmananda, Swamiji had assumed the name 'Vivekananda' on the day he performed Viraja Homa in July 1890. See Swami Ekatmananda, 'When did Swamiji Really Take the Name Vivekananda?' *Prabuddha Bharata*, 90/7 (July 1985), 297.
6. 'When did Swamiji Really Take the Name Vivekananda?', 299.
7. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.261.
8. Swami Akhandananda wrote in his letter to Pramadas Mitra dated 28 June 1892 that Swamiji had first come to Junagadh from Khetri and then went to Kutch. See Swami Akhandananda, *Sharanagati O Seva* (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 1403 BE), 80-1. So the name that was assumed in Khetri and remained in use in Junagadh—was perhaps changed in Porbandar. He might have gone to Junagadh via Limbdi. The Raja of Limbdi might have given an introduction letter for Swamiji's visit to Girnar.
9. Shankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha*, 7 vols (Kolkata: Mandal Book House, 1995), 1.59.
10. Benishanker Sharma, *Swami Vivekananda—A Forgotten Chapter of His Life* (Kolkata: Towards Freedom, 2013), 194. In the English translation of the original Waqyat Register in page 31 of this book, the name Vivekananda has not been translated due to oversight.
11. A photocopy of the letter was received by the courtesy of Shyamsundar Sharma, grandson of Pandit Jhabarmal Sharma.
12. Swami Gambhirananda, *Yuganayak Vivekananda*, 3 vols (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 1398 BE), 1.191.
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14. *The Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda*, 10 vols (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1970), 10.714.
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# Ways of Knowing Mantras

Damon F Lynch

MANTRAS ARE ‘UBIQUITOUS and enigmatic utterances.’<sup>1</sup> On the surface of things, they seem utterly simple—a word, a few words, or perhaps a short phrase. What makes them different from other words is that they are of a special character and are to be repeated endlessly. To the modern mind, they typically seem like empty, forced repetition. When the term mantra appears in a newspaper it invariably refers to an idea or slogan that is deliberately repeated, sometimes to the point of ad nauseam.

The modern notion of a mantra as a forced or largely worthless repetition is most unfortunate. When properly understood, mantras are powerful, consciousness changing, and utterly defy normal linguistic categorisation. In this essay, I refer to mantras not in the sense that newspapers do. Rather, I refer to them as they have been developed in spiritual traditions for thousands of years.

Alper writes: ‘As a tool of human intentionality, mantras are protean. They are used in an astonishing variety of contexts, for a plethora of purposes, with a multitude of informing emotions, and by the widest variety of individuals.’<sup>2</sup> In this essay naturally I cannot attend to anything like a full variety of situations in which mantras are used; nor can I attend to the parallels and contrasts between mantras in various times and locales throughout history. As Padoux writes, ‘the subject of mantras is so vast’<sup>3</sup> that it could fill multiple scholarly volumes.

Instead, my aim is substantially more modest.

After briefly describing mantras and their efficacy, I introduce scholarly discussions concerning how they ought to be understood. My main focus, however, is to discuss how to best know mantras. There are two broad ways of knowing mantras: via their rational analysis using accepted academic research methodologies, and via their daily practice. The latter approach is embedded in a system of inquiry whose guarantor of validity is not like that of the former. I argue that the latter approach is better suited to the problem of understanding mantras, and that the ideas of C S Peirce offer a bridge between the two approaches.

## *The Puzzle of Mantras*

Padoux writes: ‘We know, or we believe we know, what a mantra is. In fact, the term is both impossible to translate and very difficult to define properly’ (300). Part of the challenge—for the modern, Western-looking mind at least—is that it is an Indian term, embedded in a civilisation that has had definite ideas about speech developed through centuries of philosophical thought and religious practice. Concurring with Padoux, Gonda writes, ‘our modern languages do not possess a single term which might cover what the Indians understood, and often still understand by a mantra.’<sup>4</sup>

Mantras are probably embedded more deeply within Indian cultural and religious traditions than in any other. As Gonda argues, the ‘significance of mantras in Indian religions can indeed hardly be over-estimated. They are

one of those elements of the Indian culture which existed already before the dawn of history and survive, until the present day, in a variety of functions and applications' (260).

For Gonda, mantras are 'one of the numerous indicia of the agelong continuity of Indian religious thought' (249). Alper notes that 'Such generalizations are dangerous, for they tend to reify traditional Indian culture and suggest that it was an unchanging monolith. Nonetheless, my study of mantra leads me to conclude that Gonda is correct in some large measure'.<sup>5</sup>

Padoux cautions that we should understand that mantras

are a part of a certain type of practice, functioning within a definite ideology, that of Hinduism, where mythic elements play an essential role, and within a particular anthropological (social, psychological) framework. Theirs is not a case of speech or language in general (if there is such a thing), still less of language as we conceive or use it. Mantras function and have a 'meaning' within a certain universe of discourse, within an articulated and systematized whole, that imposed by a particular use of language in the Indian context, outside of which they can no more exist than a fish out of water, if only because of the great difficulty of defining what a mantra is outside that context.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of scholarly analysis, Padoux is of course correct, even if perhaps over-cautious. However his warning does not obviate the obvious point that there have been people who are not Indian and have been using linguistic devices that appear remarkably like mantras throughout recorded history. That is, they have used them in ways parallel to how spiritual



Andre Padoux (b. 1920)

aspirants in India have used them. Alper,<sup>7</sup> Coward and Goa,<sup>8</sup> and Nagler<sup>9</sup> *inter alia* briefly discuss parallel practices within non-Hindu traditions outside of India. Oman and Driskell discuss their use within Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Easwaran writes: 'The mantram has appeared in every major spiritual tradition, West and East, because it fills a deep, universal need in the human heart'.<sup>11</sup>

### Key Attributes of Mantras from a Linguistic Perspective

Hymes writes: 'It is a truism, but one frequently ignored in research, that *how* something is said is part of *what* is said.'<sup>12</sup> This is especially true of mantras. However they are performed—in speech, silent repetition, or even writing—the key point is their frequent and sustained repetition. Mantras are to be *performed*. Staal writes: 'In India, language is not something with which you *name* something. It is in general something with which you *do* something. Therefore, performatives, speech acts and pragmatics all developed in India'.<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars, including Staal, Gonda, Alper, and Yelle note the performative aspect of mantras and the importance of understanding them within the context of ritual. For instance Gonda writes: 'A mantra is always a source of activity, it is always a potential means of achieving a special effect'.<sup>14</sup> He further writes that 'mantras are to accompany, to sanctify and "ratify" the ritual acts, permeating them with the transcendent power of the divine Word' (259). Yelle discusses the limits of Austin's concept of the performative utterance and argues that Austin 'failed to account for the contribution of poetic form to the performative function of ritual'.<sup>15</sup>

There is no scholarly consensus as to whether mantras are instances of language or not. Alper argues they are, but Staal argues that they are not.<sup>16</sup> Alper suggests their positions are irreconcilable. Moreover, the question of how to conceptualise a mantra's meaning is far from immediately obvious. Padoux perhaps states it best when he writes:

Mantras, whether in the form of sentences, words, or sounds, have a 'meaning' (by which I mean that they help to do something), which very well may not appear in their verbal or phonetic sequence. ...

Perhaps, one could say that mantras have no meaning in the usual sense of the word, which is not to say that they do not make sense for those who use them, but they do have efficiency. They bring about an effect or, to be more precise, they are deemed, within their own cultural context, to bring one about. This is the main difference between a mantra and a word in a language, even if you believe the meaning of a word to be what you do with it or to result from the use given it in a human life. Evidently, the case with a mantra is not that of a 'normal' speech situation. Mantra has to do with humanly uttered sound, it is even a linguistic phenomenon since it is uttered in speech or mentally. But, it is a linguistic phenomenon of a very particular, not to say peculiar, sort.<sup>17</sup>

### **Mantra's Efficacy**

There is a growing body of medical research on the efficacy of mantra use. Among healthcare workers, for instance, after five weeks of using Easwaran's approach, Bormann, Becker, and Gershwin

found significant improvements in stress, trait-anxiety, trait-anger, quality of life, and spiritual well-being.<sup>18</sup> Bormann, Thorp, Wetherell, and Golshan studied mantra use by combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, and found large effect sizes for reducing symptom severity, psychological distress, and increasing quality of life.<sup>19</sup> Oman, Hedberg, and Thoresen<sup>20</sup> and Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, and Flinders<sup>21</sup> studied mantra use in association with Easwaran's other teachings, which include meditation, among health professionals and college students respectively. Both studies documented reductions in stress.

Intriguingly, these studies are finding positive results after only a matter of weeks. A mantra is an activity to be used throughout one's life. The more it is repeated, the greater its benefits. Easwaran cites Mahatma Gandhi, who made determined use of the mantra 'Rama' for many decades, as saying: 'The mantram becomes one's staff of life and carries one through every ordeal. It is not repeated for the sake of repetition, but for the

sake of purification, as an aid to effort. It is no empty repetition. For each repetition has a new meaning, carrying you nearer and nearer to God.'<sup>22</sup>

Now, I consider two contrasting ways of explaining what mantras are and why they are effective. I use Yelle to embody the first approach, and Easwaran and Aurobindo to embody the second. It is probably difficult to find two more contrasting approaches. Unlike scholars such as Alper, Gonda, Padoux, and Staal, Yelle forcefully rejects the second approach. The conflict

*Jan Gonda (1905–91)*





between the two approaches is thus helpful in clarifying their underlying assumptions.

I first describe the two approaches, before discussing their contrasts.

### **Rational Analysis of Mantras**

For Yelle, 'mantras are used for both mundane and spiritual purposes, and span the continuum of function between spells and prayers'.<sup>23</sup> Tantric mantras are 'like the spells of other cultures', in that 'they must be repeated in precisely correct form in order to be effective' (17).

Yelle's overall project is to use tantric mantras to 'demonstrate how poetry contributes to the effectiveness of ritual by constructing a virtual bridge between language and reality, and conjuring that persuasive illusion of a natural language' (6). For Yelle, a natural language is 'the cross-cultural idea of a language that, having a direct connection to reality, is both true and effective' (4). In short, this is the idea that the word can affect the world. Yelle clarifies this further when he writes: 'By this term I do not mean what is commonly meant: a language that arose spontaneously in a living culture, as opposed to a created "artificial language". Many natural languages (in the sense in which I use the term), including Tantric mantras, are highly artificial, deliberate attempts to remedy the failures of our ordinary language to correspond with reality' (4).

Yelle considers the proper analysis of the linguistic forms of mantras to be objective. In contrast, interpretations of the meaning of mantras that include mystical explanations are subjective and 'highly problematic' (19). He strongly believes in the utility of his objective approach: 'Although humanists have often confined themselves to the task of interpreting the subjective meaning of particular traditions, one of the goals of any science, including the human sciences, ought to be explanation, a rational account of a

phenomenon that articulates general principles which may then be affirmed, rejected, or modified on the basis of further evidence' (59).

Arguably the most critical assumption underlying his analysis is his claim that people use devices like mantras as a means of satisfying emotional and psychological ends, creating an 'illusion of control':

Ritual frequently elevates the quotidian to the extraordinary, substituting an illusion of control in response to perennial human quandaries and the punctuations of pragmatic crises that highlight these. Lacking direct control over reality, human beings fall back on what is at hand, over which they do have control, namely language, and attempt to leverage reality from within the confines of discourse. Given the impossibility of constructing a direct connection between language and reality, various poetic devices are applied to produce the appearance of such a connection. Language becomes a substitute for reality. (55)

His entire project pivots around this central assumption. Instead of engaging with scholarly literature arguing for or against mysticism, he takes for granted that its promises are simply illusory.

### **The Spiritual Practice of Mantras**

In his teachings, Easwaran is concerned not so much with the philosophy and psychology of mantras, but their practical use. As guidance, he draws heavily upon the personal experience of the world's mystics. As someone steeped in scholarly training, he values intellectual frameworks, but for him the truth of religion is found in its *realisation* in the reality of daily life.<sup>24</sup> Through his own experience, he found that 'over a long period of time, the mantram can bring about far-reaching changes in your state of mind, gradually elevating your consciousness'.<sup>25</sup> He writes that a mantra 'is a powerful spiritual formula, which, when repeated silently in the mind, has

the capacity to transform consciousness. There is nothing magical about this. It is simply a matter of practice. The mantram is a short, powerful spiritual formula for the highest power that we can conceive of—whether we call it God, or the ultimate reality, or the Self within. Whatever name we use, with the mantram we are calling up what is best and deepest in ourselves' (12).

For Easwaran, not just any word will do as a mantra. He counsels choosing a mantra used by great spiritual teachers throughout history and the present and then sticking with it for life. He counsels choosing a mantra 'of proven power, one which has enabled many men and women before you to realize for themselves the unity of life. The roots of such a mantram are far deeper than we can know when we first begin to use it, and this is what enables it to grow in our consciousness' (28).

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) is described by Padoux as a 'modern spiritual master';<sup>26</sup> Gonda cites him approvingly. Concerning mantras, Aurobindo holds a very similar if not identical view to that of Easwaran. For Aurobindo, the mantra is a 'psycho-spiritual means' towards 'spiritual power, knowledge or Ananda'; it is 'at once a symbol, an instrument and a sound body for the divine manifestation'.<sup>27</sup> Aurobindo writes:

The theory of the Mantra is that it is a word of power born out of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental, framed in the heart and not originally constructed by the intellect, held in the mind, again concentrated on by the waking mental consciousness and then thrown out silently or vocally—the silent word is perhaps held to be more potent than the spoken—precisely for the work of creation. The Mantra can not only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychical being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did

not before possess, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the production of material forms on the physical plane.<sup>28</sup>

Easwaran theorises that there is 'much in common' between the Hindu thought of the type Aurobindo draws on above and 'recent discoveries in modern science'. It is worthwhile quoting him at extended length in order to understand this puzzling notion of 'vibrations':

According to this theory [a theory in ancient Hindu scriptures], the entire phenomenal world consists of vibrations, just as matter, according to modern physics, may be looked at as a concentration of energy. The physicist will tell you that in the last analysis, this book is not a solid object; it is a structure of vibrating energies temporarily fixed in a particular pattern. In the Hindu theory of vibration, matter is the most rigid, the most 'condensed' of vibrations; it is solid and perceptible to the senses. Energy is less rigid, more subtle. It is not solid and often not perceptible, but it is not different in kind from matter; it is still patterns of vibration, only in a more subtle state. The subtlest of vibrations, according to the ancient sages, is the so-called cosmic sound, the creative Word out of which the entire universe of stars and seas, plants and animals and human beings has evolved. The passage from Saint John—'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'—has an almost exact parallel in the Rig Veda, one of the oldest of Hindu scriptures, which speaks of the unmanifested Godhead, called Brahman: 'In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word, and the Word was truly the supreme Brahman'.

This Word, the cosmic sound, is not perceptible to the senses, but it can be experienced in very deep meditation. It is most closely approximated by the syllable Om—or Aum, as

it is sometimes pronounced. When we utter Om with awareness of its significance, we are to some degree evoking the supreme reality for which it stands.<sup>29</sup>

As Easwaran points out, whether the theory of vibration is accepted or not, mantras like *Om* have stood the test of time.

(To be concluded)

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# ***The Brain and Holistic Living***

**Gopal C Bhar**

## ***Introduction***

**T**HE CULTIVATION OF KNOWLEDGE is the prime activity of the human being. Swami Vivekananda said: ‘The goal of mankind is knowledge. That is the one ideal placed before us by Eastern philosophy. Pleasure is not the goal of man, but knowledge. Pleasure and happiness come to an end.’<sup>1</sup> Knowledge is partly generated within us and partly collected from the world outside by our brain. Scientifically, the brain is an electrochemical organ, functioning with electromagnetic energy. The brain receives a constant stream of information through our five sense organs. Electrical activity emanating from the brain is displayed in the form of brainwaves as measured by EEG, electroencephalogram. The wave pattern of the heart is measured by ECG, electrocardiogram.

It is the nature of our five organs of knowledge to collect information from the outside world, but through practice one can turn them inward to realise the great source of knowledge already present within: ‘The self-existent Lord destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore, one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self.’<sup>2</sup> One of the great sayings of the Upanishads is ‘You are That’. God is present in the human body. Most people remain satisfied with material comforts, only a few care to get into the depth of being.

## ***Glimpses of Brain-Based Living***

Brain is a memory-driven system that uses five sense organs and also the perceptions of time,

space, and consciousness. Everything we know and learn is stored in the brain as certain patterns. Brain uses stored memories to constantly make predictions about everything we ‘see’ through our sense organs, through its neo-cortex. This ability of prediction is intelligence. Our intelligence tests are, in some way, the tests of memory and prediction.

Any new thought, especially of a high nature, creates a disturbance throwing people off their balance. Whatever one may read, listen, or observe in the course of life, one retains or memorises very little, the rest will overflow. It is because human nature likes to easily run through existing ruts. This makes acceptance of higher thought and ideal difficult.

Neuroplasticity shows us that our thinking, learning, and acting change brain’s functional and physical anatomy.<sup>3</sup> It is the tendency of the brain to shape itself according to experience.

Neuroscientists tell that our brains have both hard-wiring and soft-wiring. The hard-wiring in our brain ensures that structures are connected to one another. The soft-wiring refers to brain’s ability to enact change determined by our experience in the world. But for a human being equipped with intellect, there is a choice for upgradation. That’s why this intellectual faculty has been categorised in the scripture as the sixth sense in addition to the usual five organs of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> This upgradation of knowledge is limited to the sensory level. To switch over to higher spiritual knowledge one needs to develop a discerning faculty enabling one to choose the



preferable over the pleasurable. The *Mundaka Upanishad* identifies two kinds of knowledge, *apara vidya* and *para vidya*.<sup>5</sup>

*Apara vidya* is worldly knowledge, also known as science, which is acquired by the brain through our sense organs, while *para vidya* is the higher knowledge of the Self, which is attained by transcending one's body-mind complex. *Para vidya* is subjective and beyond the sense organs.

Scientifically we 'see' only a narrow part of electromagnetic spectrum. Nikola Tesla, one of the giants of science, who met Swami Vivekananda, said: 'If you wish to understand the secrets of the Universe, think of energy, frequency and vibration.'<sup>6</sup> Our sense organs are like cameras and sensors measuring sounds and vibrations beyond the range of hearing, and light waves beyond the visible range. Even the vast electromagnetic spectrum remains unexplored—only recently the Tera Hertz electromagnetic spectrum is being explored.<sup>7</sup> Further, there could be faults in the sense organ or instrument resulting in wrong information.<sup>8</sup> The holistic interrelation of the sense organs is the regime of heart often termed as wisdom, *medha*, or *dhi* in the scriptures. This has been termed as sattvic knowledge in the Bhagavadgita: 'The knowledge by which one sees the one undivided, imperishable substance in all beings which appear divided, should be known to be sattvic.'<sup>9</sup>

It further elaborates that if the individual organs are made free from its inherent attachments, the 'observing' power becomes manifold: 'An agent, who is free from attachment, non-egotistic, endowed with fortitude and enthusiasm, and unaffected by success or failure, is called sattvic person of action.'<sup>10</sup>

Objective knowledge is termed hard-skill while subjective knowledge is termed soft-skill. The existence of two categories of knowledge was recognised by the great astrophysicist Arthur

Eddington in his book *The Nature of the Physical World*.<sup>11</sup> He compared the body of physical knowledge to fishes caught from the ocean by a net and asserted that the second category of knowledge is like the fishes that escaped through the net and is determined by the characteristics of the catching net itself. Albert Einstein, the scientific giant of the twentieth century also recognised the existence of subtle knowledge beyond the discoveries of objective truth and opined thus:

Our time is distinguished by wonderful achievements in the fields of scientific understanding and the technical application of those insights. Who would not be cheered by this? But let us not forget that knowledge and skills alone cannot lead humanity to a happy and dignified life. Humanity has every reason to place the proclaimers of high moral standards and values above the discoverers of objective truth. What humanity owes to personalities like Buddha, Moses, and Jesus ranks for me higher than all the achievements of the enquiring and constructive mind.<sup>12</sup>

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**Human nature likes to easily run through existing ruts. This makes acceptance of higher thought and ideal difficult.**

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### ***Glimpses of Heart-Based Living***

Our heart starts to beat even while in the womb, before the formation of brain. The heart cells are one of the first cells to form in the embryo, so the body grows and is organised in the heart field. But when the brain begins to develop, it grows from the bottom up. So the heart carries something from the previous birth in the form of genes. That is why it is said that the five factors namely, 'life-span, the type of work, wealth, learning, and the time of one's death are determined while one is in the womb'.<sup>13</sup>

As the master control system, the heart pumps blood throughout the body. The mechanical

prowess of the human heart is surprising, beating over a hundred thousand times a day, two and a half billion times in an average lifespan, and in just one year pumps about half a million gallons of blood. The heart has three roles to play: physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The function of the physical or anatomical heart located on the left side of the chest is to maintain life—to circulate oxygen and dispose waste gases, trigger the immune system, and maintain the rhythm. The spiritual and emotional heart, though invisible, possesses transpersonal qualities like peacefulness, gracefulness, truthfulness, joyousness, creativity, responsive-

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**The human being is not merely a living organism but the bearer of the universal message of goodness, wisdom, beauty, and human worthiness.**

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ness, and so on. The heart controls energy flow in the body resulting in the rhythmic variations of the heartbeats and actions of life. A healthy body is a source of great comfort. Care and kindness of others help the growth of the spiritual heart. Where there is a fragmentation of personality, the emotional heart suffers and the spiritual heart can offer comfort only if subjected to spiritual practice. In emotional distress the physical heart suffers and may lead to cardiovascular diseases. The three hearts are linked so closely that one affects the other.

The human being is not merely a living organism but the bearer of the universal message of goodness, wisdom, beauty, and human worthiness. The relation of human beings with one another should be based on sincere reciprocal sympathy, love, and cooperativeness, and not on the basis of ostentation, expedience, and a business-like attitude. The solution of life's problems is impossible without forgiveness, sacrifice, and

kindness to fellowmen in critical moments, for sympathy, self-sacrifice, and mutual forgiveness are among the pillars of the edifice of social life, which is based on cooperation. 'A forest pierced by arrows, or cut down by hatchets may again grow, but one's heart wounded and censured by ill-spoken words never recovers.'<sup>14</sup>

We approach divinity through the heart not through the head. 'It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart' as Mahatma Gandhi said.<sup>15</sup> Hinduism, Sufism, Buddhism, Kashmir Shaivism, and the teachings of Jesus—all hint that the heart is the house of eternal knowledge or the place of real knowing and this knowledge reveals itself as faith and divinity. In many cultures of the world, the heart has been regarded as the primary source of wisdom, emotion, and spiritual insight. Chinese philosophy<sup>16</sup> indicates that the heart is not only an additional organ of perception like the five sense organs but also the organ of thinking, reasoning, and feeling. Many ancient people including the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and Babylonians maintained that the primary organ capable of directing our emotions, morality, and decision-making is the heart. However, the ancient Greeks considered intellect and emotion as separate functions. Plato on the other hand, compared emotion with wild horses to be reined by the intellect. The Bible says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God';<sup>17</sup> and 'The kingdom of God is within you'.<sup>18</sup> So says Vedanta and every great teacher.<sup>19</sup> The spiritual treasure rests in our heart. Spirituality demands a heart like the boundless sky and unfathomed ocean. It is the seat of intuition of spiritual consciousness. Nearly all spiritual teachers agree that the heart is the seat of spiritual consciousness and advice meditation, by focusing concentration on the centre of the heart.

The more deeply centred one is in the heart,

the more one is better off physically, mentally, and spiritually. Heart-based living allows us to experience less self-centredness and more genuine fulfilment. In brain-based or materialistic living, we often cannot find out how to adjust or play with the brain so that it can bring out our inherent qualities. Energising the heart is the prerequisite for great accomplishments in life. The root of most of our worldly problems is a lack of emotional management, a lack of understanding, care, respect, and compassion. Most organisations and institutions are facing functional problems because their leaders lack skills to manage themselves emotionally. Heart-based spiritual wisdom can definitely lead to better governance since such enlightened legislators could bring enormous reforms in society. The great writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery also said 'It is only with one's heart that one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.'<sup>20</sup> The same theme is reflected by the Chinese philosopher Confucius: 'To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts straight.'<sup>21</sup>

### **Heart-Brain Communication**

Cognitive and emotional information collected by the brain and the heart are separate and unique in controlling the functioning of the body. Apart from communication through nerves, there are biophysical communications through blood pressure, biochemical communication through hormones, and communication of electrical energy produced in the organs through electromagnetic fields. Alfred Gilman and Martin Rodbell—Nobel Prize winners in Physiology and Medicine in 1994—determined that the body's cells communicate with each

other through subtle low electromagnetic signals. Neuro-cardiography has revealed that the heart has its own nervous system similar to that of the brain, and thereby has an independent sensory capacity. Though they work independently with their individual processing systems, there is a constant exchange of information. The heart's nervous system detects, circulates hormones and neuro-chemicals, and senses the heart rate. The two-way communication between the cognitive and emotional systems is hard-wired into the brain. The number of neural connections going from the emotional center to the cognitive center is greater than the number of neural connections going the other way. Neurons in both the brain and the heart emit electromagnetic waves, but of the two, the heart is the most powerful source in the human body. The number of nerve cells in the heart is about sixty per cent and the rest are muscular cells. Neurons function as both receivers and transmitters—sending and receiving. The heart's electrical field is about sixty times greater in amplitude than the electrical activity generated in the brain. This field measured by an ECG, can be detected anywhere on the surface of the body. Apart from the electrical activity of human heart, brain, nerve cells, and muscles, associated with these electrical activities are bio-magnetic fields. The magnetic field produced by the heart is more than five thousand times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain and can be detected a number of feet away from the body.

External electromagnetic fields can potentially distort and disrupt these internal cellular communication signals and can result in abnormal cellular metabolism and consequently illness such as allergies, neuro-dermatitis, fatigue, asthma, heart disease, brain cancer, depression, sleep disorders, and so on. With the explosion in radio and TV broadcasting stations, radio

telephone networks, cordless phones, and cell phones, the density of radio waves and micro-waves around us is now a million times higher than we can bear. Living organisms are extremely sensitive to electromagnetic fields. The human cell membrane responds to electromagnetic waves through the opening and closing tiny ports on the membrane surface. The heart is both broadcasting and receiving the electromagnetic frequencies which we call emotions. We all experience these subjectively before verbalising them. Thus our heart not only affects our own experience, but it also influences those around us including plants, animals, and other non-living things. In turn, we can be influenced by the signals that others send out. Thus not only physical touch but the physical proximity of individuals produces information exchange in the form of imprinting of memories in the hearts of the people involved. This is compassion.

When we experience pleasure, our blood vessels dilate allowing blood to flow more freely to the extremities heightening nerve sensations and making the eyes and skin radiant. In contrast, for negative emotions the blood retreats into internal organs, deadening nerve sensations, hardening the heart, and making the eyes look cold. We are influenced by the temperament of people having 'similar' heart. This strong field influences others as one can experience a soothing effect in religious places, temples, churches, and so on. Conversely, a disturbed person disturbs other people. This may be identified as the effect of *tanmatra* in Indian spirituality. It follows the physical law of synchronicity. Accordingly, our energy is affected by energy-fields around us and tends to follow stronger energy-fields. People are more likely to feel good when they receive love, gratitude, and appreciation as opposed to negative emotions like anger, hatred, and frustration. When waves in tune gather, they increase

in intensity. So, while receiving good information the cells of the body become healthier and vice versa.

### **Synthesis of Heart-Based Living with Brain**

There are four dimensions of human growth and development: physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. A baby grows steadily by appropriate physical nourishment accompanied with exercise. Physical strength in the body increases up to forty years of age, while intellectual strength is developed in the brain rapidly at a young age, and continues throughout one's life. Indian thought considers the first three dimensions of human growth as necessary but not sufficient, and there is the need for a fourth dimension of human growth. This is spiritual growth, most vital and significant, but least recognised, without which human craving and search for fulfilment will only result in defeat. The real strength or courage in our life lies in spirituality, which comes from the heart.

In ancient India, young boys had to first memorise the Vedas while living in the house of their guru. The Vedas were embedded in memory before the actual development of their intellect. Its starting point is the development of morality at young age since morality is the basic condition of spirituality. That is why spiritual teachers recommended *shama*, mental restraint and *dama*, physical restraint, as the two primary stages and bases of ethics. The satisfaction or happiness gained through physical and intellectual development is limited, changeable, and dependent on external objects, but the fulfilment attained by spirituality comes from within. This is highlighted in the Gita: 'With the heart unattached to external contacts, one realises the joy that is in the Self; with the heart devoted to the meditation on Brahman, he or she attains undecaying happiness.'<sup>22</sup>

Swami Vivekananda realised the need for



getting knowledge both from the brain and the heart for a full-fledged development of the human being:

The heart is great indeed; it is through the heart that come the great inspirations of life. I would a hundred times rather have a little heart and no brain, than be all brains and no heart. Life is possible, progress is possible for him who has heart, but he who has no heart and only brains dies of dryness.

At the same time we know that he who is carried along by his heart alone has to undergo many ills, for now and then he is liable to tumble into pitfalls. The combination of heart and head is what we want. I do not mean that a man should compromise his heart for his brain or vice versa, but let everyone have an infinite amount of heart and feeling, and at the same time an infinite amount of reason. Is there any limit to what we want in this world? Is not the world infinite? There is room for an infinite amount of feeling, and so also for an infinite amount of culture and reason. Let them come together without limit, let them be running together, as it were, in parallel lines each with the other.<sup>23</sup>

A person can therefore be wise and successful by creating a harmony between the head and the heart. Standard intelligence tests or an IQ score test the ability to solve an objective problem alone and so do not define our full potential. A high IQ does not always lead to success in career or life. There are many other qualities like creativity, optimism, and determination that are also important for success in life. According to the noted psychologist Daniel Goleman, the emotional quotient (EQ) has been an overlooked factor and is an extremely important ingredient for success in life perhaps even more than intellectual ability.<sup>24</sup> Abilities of getting along with others, being optimistic and determined, are one of the many factors that bring success. EQ is the

innate ability of a person to influence one's own emotion and the emotions of other people. It is the head working with the heart. It is not the triumph of the head over the heart, but the unique intersection of both. EQ is very important to human beings as a way for them to be successful with other people. 'Intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence. ... The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart. To do that well in our lives means we must first understand more exactly what it means to use emotion intelligently.'<sup>25</sup> Spiritual quotient is the hereditary holistic capacity of the human brain and heart that gives us the ability to form deeper meanings, values, purpose, and motivation. This is the ability to process all aspects of life from an eternal, timeless, and multidimensional perspective and to perceive the natural world through infinite probabilities and limitless resources that transcend the laws of physics and the restrictions of physical realities.

### ***Heart and Brain in Stress Management***

Stress is one of the causes of high blood pressure causing serious illnesses like heart disease and stroke. Inferiority complex, physical and mental

*Daniel Goleman (b. 1946)*



deficiency, fear of falling from power, wealth, social position, humiliation, fear of no enjoyment, and so on, causes anxiety. Stress is caused by overwork, fear, and excessive desire or greed. It is associated with physiological changes in the body like increase in blood pressure, heart rate, and respiratory rate; blood diversion from the digestive system to muscles; decrease of digestive system activity; and an increase of blood sugar to provide energy to the muscles and brain. The sociological factors change into psychological, and finally end up with the biological.

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**Both in worldly and spiritual life, our aim is to make our mind receptive. We need both brain-based and heart-based knowledge.**

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The mother of all stress hormones called cortisol is released in large quantities during stress or negative emotions like anxiety, anger, or hostility, even though cortisol in small amounts is necessary for everyday functioning. During metabolism, oxygen is converted to carbon dioxide, which is eliminated by the lungs. But during stress the brain is believed to cause deficiency in oxygen that disturbs its regulatory activity. One way to improve this condition is an oxygen-rich blood supply to the brain. Controlled breathing exercise is an easy way to manage stress, although there are various other methods for coping with stress including daily relaxation techniques, changes in lifestyle, good sleep, a healthy diet, appropriate nutritional supplements, medication, and so on. The present discussion is focused on breathing. Our breath is an indicator of the state of the mind and is not merely ventilation or oxygenation of blood. Rapid breathing directly affects the mind, which in turn affects the body and causes stress.

The average breathing rate for a healthy person is fifteen to eighteen per minute. It can rise to twenty-six for people with hypertension and


up to thirty for persons suffering from anxiety neurosis. One is required to carefully control the breathing rate for alleviation of stress. But chronic stress keeps the sympathetic system in overdrive while the parasympathetic system tends to be in under-drive. As a result, the system stays out of balance leading to exhaustion of energy supplies, cumulative cellular damage, and anxiety leading to depression. While sedative drugs can temporarily dampen the sympathetic system, no medication is available for parasympathetic system. Thus by voluntarily changing the pattern of breath, we can change the messages that the body is sending to the brain and thereby try to normalise the way of our thinking and feeling. That's why breathing exercises, done by Eastern yogis for centuries, have been effective in bringing a balance of the activity of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. In some Buddhist monasteries conscious breathing is practised to increase one's concentration.

*Pranayama*, a breathing exercise, is practised in India for quieting the mind after purification of the external and internal organs. These two steps include celibacy and are considered to be absolutely essential for a spiritual aspirant but these are often skipped in the Western world where calmness to a certain degree is the aim. *Prana* is the life force and not just the air we breathe, the water we drink, or the food we eat. The activities done by *prana* include thinking, breathing, eating, drinking, digesting, and circulating blood throughout the body. It is actually the control of energy throughout the body. To a spiritual aspirant or yogi, it is not simply a breathing exercise but a part of spiritual education. When *prana* is controlled, bodily actions done by *prana* can eventually be controlled.

Developments in neuroscience reveal that the key to successful stress management lies in the proper integration of thought and emotion. This is similar to the coherence of ordinary light leading to the generation of the powerful laser. A

coherent heart is one that has an ordered heart-rhythm variability pattern that can be measured in an electrocardiogram while an incoherent heart is marked by disordered or irregular heart-rhythm variability patterns.

## Conclusion

Both in worldly and spiritual life, our aim is to make our mind receptive. We need both brain-based and heart-based knowledge. To become spiritual we need to empty our mind of worldly attachments. This emptying of the gross is meant for accommodating the subtle and may be compared to the famous scientific example of the experiment of two Magdeburg hemispheres where the more the inside air is emptied out, the more would the hemispheres be firmly fixed, and it would be impossible to separate them as nature abhors vacuum. It is heartening to note that the concepts of non-causality and interconnectedness have been conceptualised while quantifying the behaviour of subtle particles in modern Physics. 

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# The Eternal Dance of Shiva

Swami Kritarthananda

## The Cosmic Rhythm

THE WORLD-RENOWNED dance maestro, Sri Birju Maharaj once made a remarkable statement as a preface to one of his performances. He said that there is an eternal rhythm going on ceaselessly in the universe. Knowingly or unknowingly we are all dancing to that rhythm. At times we move away from it, only to come back to the original rhythm before long. The various modulations and ramifications of rhythm in a ballet are meant to demonstrate this fact.

As we take a look on our lives with all performances we discover the same truth. Through all our performances—joys and sorrows, passions and emotions, love and hate, work and meditation—we are making our journey to eternity. To some, this path is pleasant, perhaps strewn with flowers, while to others it is painful, drear, and thorny. Again, some like to make a shortcut by travelling in a straight line to reach quickly to the end, yet others may make a detour. But sooner or later all will come back to the central line to join the rhythm of life. In the theory of sound or light this type of motion is graphically expressed as a transverse wave or a pendulum movement.

The Vedic seers in India discovered this eternal rhythm in the external as well as internal nature aeons ago. They named it *ritam*. The word ‘rhythm’ comes close to *ritam* both phonetically and etymologically. The Vedic seers used the word to mean truth in the higher level, namely, cosmic harmony. The word *satyam*, truth, is a relative term, and is limited by the bounds of

relative existence. In that level, truth and falsehood are, like good and evil, the obverse and reverse of the same coin. The same fact, under a particular situation and condition, may be called truth and under another set of values it may be called falsehood. Further, the concepts of good and evil, truth and falsehood, and all such pairs of polarities are the antitheses of one another. Not so with *ritam*. Though for all practical purposes the word *anritam* is used to denote untruth, it is actually a deviation from harmony, a phenomenon of ‘losing the track’, and not withdrawing oneself from the journey. When Swami Vivekananda said that man travels not from falsehood to truth, but from lesser truth to higher truth, he had in his mind this Vedic idea of *ritam*. However sinful a person may be, one need not be eternally damned. Instead, such exhortations will encourage one to shake off the delusions of one’s understanding that have developed through a wrong orientation towards life and help one to move ahead with all the more vigour and clearer understanding. There is no mention of a hell or any such place of punishment in the Vedas. The greatest retribution is to come back to earth through transmigration and to start from where the journey finished last. In other words, one is given another chance to make amends, to come back closer to the central line leading to the goal.

The whole universe is in a state of flux. Every moment a fight is going on between the pairs of opposites. But in spite of all this, there is an established harmony in the whole universe. The



goal of life is to catch up with this frequency called *ritam* by the Vedic seers, *Tao* by Lao Tzu, and *Logos* by the Greek philosophers. To live in resonance with this universal vibration is to live in harmony. To miss the rhythm implies moving away from the natural state.

### Harmony and Adjustment

An important point comes up by way of this discussion. Living in harmony with the universe does not necessarily imply living a peaceful life by constantly adjusting oneself to the group or conforming with the majority even when it goes against one's principles. Living in harmony means to live in peace, but it also means to be aware of all the forces in action within and without. The harmony we observe in the external nature is mostly an unconscious one. In order to get in touch with the ultimate truth we have to be aware of the presence of the great rhythm of God in all that we see. Great poets and artists sometimes encounter such harmony when they are left alone in the open or in the countryside, with their heart bereft of all cares and worries of the workaday world. William Wordsworth, Lord Alfred Tennyson, and many other lesser-known people have had such rare experiences in unguarded moments of life when they suddenly became aware of a larger existence, a greater harmony in nature. Poets give expression to their feeling in black and white in the form of immortal poetry. Hermann Hesse, in his much-acclaimed novel *Siddhartha*, has painted in idyllic style, the realisation of the natural harmony that came to Siddhartha at long last in his life of polarities.

Almost in a similar way, Fritjof Capra came across a unique experience that led to his writing the celebrated book on science and religion, *The Tao of Physics*. His introductory lines are worth citing here:

I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment as being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. Being a physicist, I knew that the sand, rocks, water and air around me were made of vibrating molecules and atoms, and that these consisted of particles which interacted with one another by creating and destroying other particles. ... As I sat on that beach my former experiences came to life; I 'saw' cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I 'heard' its sound, and at that moment I *knew* that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of Dancers worshipped by the Hindus.<sup>1</sup>

Harmony on a collective or national level is often construed as adjustment with the whole group or indoctrination. Under the circumstances the individual is forced to repress his ego and surrender his aspiration to the herd or die. Having no choice left, people cannot but give up. The majority of the world's populace con-

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**Living in harmony means to live in peace, but it also means to be aware of all the forces in action within and without.**

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stitutes this group, which includes many of the creative personalities. Even their creative urge is controlled by the anonymous authority called society. Such people give up their freedom in order to lead a happy life. The void created in their hearts as a result of such conformity has to be temporarily filled up with many distractions of modern times like idle gossip, media, movies, and so on. But such adjustment is earned only at the cost of freedom. Harmony is a far cry for people under bondage. As a matter of fact people

are afraid of their freedom. To be free means to take up all the responsibility of one's past and present actions. With all the achievements of our vaunted civilisation we miserably fail to do so. That is the reason why most people try to escape from freedom. They are satisfied with the little freedom they can exercise within their bondage. In other words, people do not want 'freedom from'; they rather want 'freedom to'. This means they only like to exercise their powers over the less powerful ones. But in the long run this only paves the way for further bondage.

### **Shiva, the Great Dancer**

Dance is a great art of representing the harmony of the universe through various symbolic stances and movements of the limbs. The Hindu mythology demonstrates this art in the dance of the greatest dancer Shiva. *Nataraja*, the epithet of Lord Shiva, means the king of dancers. His dance posture traces its source to the harmony in the universe. Strikingly enough, after exploring the subatomic world of matters the twentieth century scientists have discovered a tremendous dynamic nature in the nuclear particles in the microcosm. To their astonishment there goes on eternally a ceaseless flow of energy in the form of particle interactions, creating and destroying particles without end. The whole process of interaction gives rise to stable, dynamic structures that move about in rhythmic movements. This continual activity involving creation, maintenance, and destruction of particles is known as the cosmic dance of energy. Different particles have different patterns of dance and, what is more, this dance is not limited to the subatomic particles but even the void participates in this cosmic dance by creating and destroying energy.

Scientists have observed a marked similarity between this dynamic movement of particles in the subatomic universe and the macrocosmic

dance of *Nataraja*, the king of dancers. This observation leads to the subsequent conclusion that Swami Vivekananda found in the depth of his meditation: 'The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan.'<sup>2</sup> The *Kathopanishad* also corroborates this concept of identity between the microcosm and the macrocosm in saying, 'What indeed is here, is there; what is there, is here likewise.'<sup>3</sup>

'Whatever the origins of Shiva's dance, it became in time the clearest image of the *activity* of God which any art or religion can boast of.'<sup>4</sup> As in the case of all other deities in the Hindu pantheon, Shiva represents the ultimate reality called Brahman. The nature remains inert when Shiva is in a state of meditation, and when he rises to dance, through his will, nature also dances to his rhythm. The word *Shiva* in Sanskrit means one who is benevolent. But in fact, as in the case of all other Hindu gods and goddesses, Shiva is neither good nor evil, but beyond both. It is a projection of the ultimate reality called Brahman. The weak call him 'good', 'compassionate', and so on while the strong dare to face the Lord in his terrible form also.

The renowned *Nataraja* form of Shiva was first realised by the ascetics of yore in the depth of meditation and later thoughtfully cast by artists and sculptors of India taking cue from those visions to symbolise the three aspects of the Lord: creation, maintenance, and destruction. The *Nataraja* is a deity with four arms. One of the left hands carrying blazing fire indicates the destructive aspect; the other left-hand pointing to the raised foot symbolises the release from the spell of maya or ignorance. One right hand is holding the drum called *damaru*, which is the source of the ceaseless sound going on in the cosmos called *nada-brahman* or *anahata-shabda*, literally, un-struck sound. The other right hand dons the posture of blessing

and fearlessness, *varabhaya mudra*, assuring protection and maintenance. *Nataraja* stands with one foot trampling on a figurine representing the primal ignorance of the universe. Shiva's body is perfectly poised and the face is serene. This shows his peaceful detachment amid the polarities of creation and destruction. The masculine aspect of the deity is represented by the right ear-ring in the form of a snake. The left one is a discus indicating the feminine aspect. The matted lock contains the river Ganga, the sustainer of life; the crescent moon denotes the creative power. The skull on the forehead stands for the destructive aspect. The third eye symbolises the higher perception of knowledge. His forehead and body besmeared with ash point to complete renunciation and detachment from all worldly concerns. The throat has become blue from the influence of the poison he drank to save the world from its bad effects. Heinrich Zimmer has described this dancing form in his inimitable style: 'His gestures, wild and full of grace, precipitate the cosmic illusion; his flying arms and legs and the swaying of his torso produce—indeed, they are—the continuous creation-destruction of the universe, death exactly balancing birth, annihilation the end of every coming-forth.'<sup>5</sup>

### Bestower of Knowledge

As is already mentioned, the dance of Shiva is not merely a cosmic dance. He can also impart through it profound knowledge to the aspirant

who seeks it. Panini, for one—whose monumental work of aphoristic Sanskrit grammar has been proved to be the most suited to adapting into a computer language—particularly artificial intelligence—formulated all his aphorisms on an amazingly scientific basis.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the intricacies of the aphorisms can be comprehended in the right perspective by the students of computer science.

*Nataraja Statue at the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN), Geneva*



This great sage, with a view to giving a new shape to Sanskrit grammar, meditated on the Lord Shiva, the bestower of knowledge. It is said that at the consummation of his samadhi, the Lord appeared before the sage and danced in his bewitching style. With his *damaru* the Lord made fourteen types of sound. Panini's mind, purified with austerity, succeeded in deciphering them into arrays of symbolic letters named *Maheshwara-sutras* or aphorisms of Shiva. These aphorisms are seminal in the formulation of the whole grammar of Panini. Students of the Paninian grammar are well-acquainted with the verse connoting this story.

The ultimate reality manifested itself first through the subtle aspect of sound, which found concrete expression through the pronunciation of letters. This is known as *shabda* brahman. The book of John in the Bible also gives an idea of this *shabda* brahman of Hindu theology: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'<sup>7</sup> Sound is one of the main factors in the communication of ideas.

What insight do we derive from the cosmic dance of Shiva? It beckons us to participate in the eternal rhythm of the universe by attuning ourselves to it. It also bids us to remain perfectly calm in the midst of all the polarities of the world, to see inaction in action and vice versa.<sup>8</sup>

The word *Shiva-ratri* ordinarily means the night of vigil for the worship of the great god, Shiva. Night means darkness and darkness implies inertness. In this darkness, Shiva dances along with his two companions *nandi* and *bhringi*, who represent the entire gamut of manifested universe. This world is compared to a cremation ground haunted by ghosts and ghouls. Standing there, Shiva dances in perfect rhythm, absorbed in his own bliss 'that passeth all understanding'.<sup>9</sup> His dance makes the inert matter beam with life. Again, he absorbs all life expressions into himself through his destructive aspect.

### Communication through Symbols

The dance of Shiva is nothing but a symbolic representation of some concept or knowledge. Communication through symbols is an alternative to language. The relationship between a mother and her baby is carried on through symbols rather than language. The mother's approval, disapproval, or appraisal can best be understood by the child alone. The mother can also understand the child's urges from her or his gestures.

The symbols of various religions of the world also bear deep significance and characteristics

of that particular religion. Swami Vivekananda conveyed the whole gamut of principle and application inherent in the organisation of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission through its symbol.

There are several modes of communication. The *first* of these is dance. Dance is simply a language communicated through various *mudras*, gazes, gestures, and rhythms. In order to appreciate the idea behind a dance, one must be well-versed in the science of that art. The *second* means is ritual worship. At the time of worship one is not supposed to talk using sound. Worship is a way of establishing an intimate, heart-to-heart relationship with the Divine, and so one has to use the language of the gods and goddesses through signs or *mudras*. Even dumb people and mute animals have their own signs for communication. Inferior animals have less sound symbols to communicate; hence they use different gestures to express different moods. A closer observation makes this fact clear. This then is the *third* category of communication. The *fourth* is communication through dreams. Dream is the language our mind uses to convey certain ideas to our gross, externalised self. One of the main tasks of psychologists is to analyse dreams and find out the hidden urges and drives of the person. If rightly analysed, dreams reveal a lot of insights into human personality. Spiritual experiences form the *fifth* kind of symbols. They are in a way similar to dreams but the difference is that dreams are unconscious experiences whereas spiritual visions are the experiences of the super-conscious level. Besides, they leave their indelible stamp of conviction in the personality.

Spiritual experiences do not need a psychoanalyst to analyse and interpret. They are self-explanatory. They do not have much significance to souls that are not pitched to the level of understanding of the seer. Hence spiritual experiences



are not for sharing with one and all except with the guru or spiritual preceptor. The *sixth* type is expressed by an artist in abstract arts. In this case too, in order to appreciate the quality of an art one has to view it through the eyes of the artist himself. An ophthalmologist tries to enable us to see the world through our own vision, while an artist tries to convey to us an idea as *she or he* sees it. It is the artist's own language of communication. The *seventh* type of symbol is certain characters used in Chinese, Japanese, or Korean languages. The permutations and combinations of those characters form words which may have a host of meanings. One has to choose the right meaning to fit the context. For instance, the character 'wu', when combined with another character 'li', produces five meanings. They are: patterns of organic energy, my way, nonsense, I clutch my ideas, and enlightenment.

The *last*, yet most important, is nature's incessant communication with all living beings. Nature—both internal and external—does communicate to us all in its own language. When our body temperature rises above the normal, it indicates that some fighting is going on within the body due to the invasion of bacteria, virus, or other alien bodies from outside. When we are hungry, thirsty, or emotional, our internal nature communicates it to us in a particular fashion. Again, when legendary poets and literati of a Shakespeare's fame find 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, and sermons in stones,'<sup>10</sup> they do not merely express wild poetic imaginations. As a matter of fact the brooks, the rocks, the wilderness, not to speak of the vault overhead with its patches of moving clouds—all these do communicate to us. 'He that hath ears to hear,'<sup>11</sup> can hear it unerringly. If we want to communicate to another person speaking a different language, we must first be conversant with his language.

Similarly, in order to catch the language of the above entities we must tune our souls to their level of vibration. This abstract idea has been given concrete form graphically in the unique novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse. Its hero, an aspirant with sound spiritual background, possessed of the rare capacity to withdraw the mind at will and many other talents, found at

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**Time stands still in the depth of meditation because there is no movement in the mind. A relative concept cannot coexist with an absolute concept.**

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long last in his chequered life the consummation of his wisdom from the mute eloquence of the river just at the instance of another simple ferryman, Vasudeva. It is this language of the external nature that inspired the Vedic sages of yore to live constantly in harmony with nature. From the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we know the story of a simple Brahmin boy, Satyakama, of unknown parentage. He was asked by his preceptor to tend the cattle of the hermitage in the wilderness and come back when they doubled in number. The disciple followed the order with all respect and the story has it that the animals imparted to him the knowledge of supreme Brahman.<sup>12</sup> The story is not merely a figment of the imagination of the Vedic sage but a truth valid for all time. We need to live in harmony with the nature.

*Koan* is another type of language, developed by the Zen masters, in the form of a riddle that is apparently paradoxical. It needs intuition to crack the puzzle. The Indian compeer of it can be found in the scheme of aphorisms in Paninian grammar or in the Nyaya philosophy. Again, the hymn of creation, *nasadiya-sukta*,<sup>13</sup> says that there was neither existence nor non-existence in the beginning; darkness was engulfed in darkness and time stood still. This is a riddle that can


be compared only to the Zen *koan*. The time mentioned here is not the chronological time which is only a relative concept. Time stands still in the depth of meditation because there is no movement in the mind. A relative concept cannot coexist with an absolute concept.

### Implication in Life

We have described the cosmic dance of Shiva. We have also seen how the great Lord symbolically imparts knowledge to the rare souls who prepare themselves beforehand through austerity to receive his grace. The point that remains now to be explained is how the cosmic dance of Shiva can be brought to bear upon our daily life.

The Hindu mythology brings in legendary gods and goddesses with all their prowess and exploits to convey the highest truth in simple ways clear even to a toddler. Every child is acquainted with dance and its rhythmic movements. First a novice is taught the various postures without attributing any meaning to them. As one masters the art, one gains knowledge about the meaning of each posture. The student gradually grasps more and more of the inherent meaning in the art and tries to integrate them into one's own personality. Before a high stage of maturity is reached, the significance of the cosmic rhythm cannot be realised. A strong jolt is needed to wean the soul away from inordinate attachments to the world and to turn the face toward reality. Feeling the cosmic rhythm within and without is not an act of fantasy. It needs the rigorous and one-pointed effort of several births to integrate oneself with the vast ocean of rhythm surrounding us.

Brilliant scientists sometimes accidentally come upon such an experience, which may be called 'stumbling upon truth'. They become speechless with wonder to realise the eternal relationship between science and religion, as it happened in the case of Fritjof Capra.

The question is why should we try to attain harmony in life? The answer is that this harmony does not mean keeping pace with something that is outside or alien. The whole universe, with its diverse activities and polarities, is in fact a single unit having tremendous potential dynamism. Nothing is outside its periphery. Judging from the lower levels of body-mind complex with an infinite variation, we think the outside universe is different from us and thus isolate ourselves from it through selfishness. Living in harmony means to remove this barrier and remain one's own self in a larger dimension. One whose spiritual power has raised one to the level from which one can look upon all struggles for existence, all diversities, all polarities of the world with perfect equanimity; one who has succeeded in keeping oneself static amidst all dynamisms, is said to have attained the state of Shiva. 

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# Virchand Raghavji Gandhi: An Indian Spokesman and Jain Scholar

Dr Satish K Kapoor

**V**IRCHAND RAGHAVJI GANDHI (1864–1901) had many firsts to his credit. He was the first celebrated Jain to have graduated with honours from Elphinstone College, Bombay in 1880, the first authorised Jain plenipotentiary to a global religious conclave in 1893, the first to win admirers and adherents to his faith outside India, and the first non-Hindu to defend Hinduism in America and Europe. He was much ahead of his times and explained the fundamental tenets of Jainism in the living language of science and logic.

His interpretation of *Anekantavada*—the philosophy which says that each assertion though seemingly contradictory, belongs to the domain of possibility—brought the quintessential element of Jain metaphysics to the global fora. He could juxtapose, assimilate, and harmonise different religious standpoints on the praxis of deeper spirituality. His explanation of the gospel of *Ahimsa*—non-violence—in scientific idiom, appealed alike to the intellect, the heart, and the soul, and in that respect, he was a precursor to Mahatma Gandhi.

Virchand was among the first few nineteenth-century Indians to delineate the exploitative aspects of the British Raj marked by racial discrimination, destruction of Indian agriculture and handicraft industries, impoverishment of the subaltern, misuse and drainage of India's wealth to Britain, and the abolition of import duties to help the traders of Liverpool and Manchester. He spoke against the imposition of two hundred per

cent tax on the manufacture of salt 'to maintain a costly government', a sombre presage of the Salt Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. He had the courage to point out that the British Raj had legitimised the vice of drinking and raised revenue from the liquor trade, which the native rulers never did.

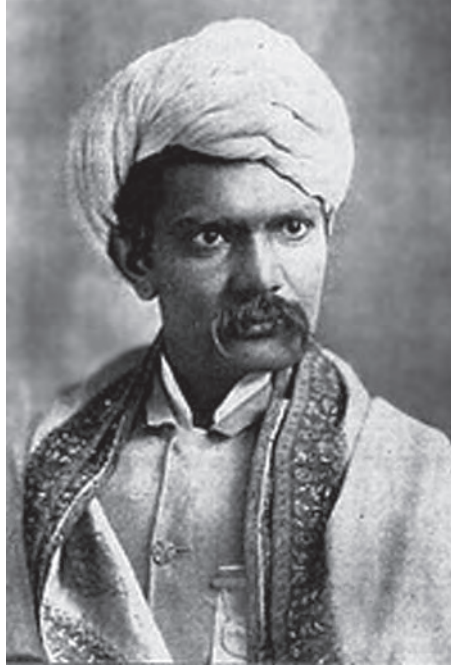
He resented that the government spent lavishly to assert its political hegemony by declaring Queen Victoria as the Empress of India in 1877, but it did little to save more than five million people from starvation and epidemics during the famine of 1896–7. He described Englishmen as conquerors who laid claim to 'extra-territorial right throughout India'. Yet his patriotism was not insular as he stood for amity and cooperation among different nations at cultural and economic levels. Despite his reservations about the ethical dimensions of the British export, he praised the British manufacturers for understanding the Indian economic milieu and the requirements of people. He was the first Jain to speak on trade relations between India and America and to guide the latter on what to export at an international meet organised by W P Wilson, Director of Philadelphia Commercial Museum.<sup>1</sup>

Born on 25 August 1864 into an affluent Jain family of Mahuva, a small town on the Arabian Sea coast, and educated at Bhavnagar and in Bombay, Virchand Raghavji Gandhi became the youngest Honorary Secretary of Shri Jain Association of India at the age of twenty-one, due to his

keen interest and involvement in the administration of charitable and religious trusts. A towering intellectual, visionary, orator, writer, and social reformer, he was a polyglot who knew fourteen languages and was conversant both with Western and Indian thought.

He knew as much about Jainism—in which he had been trained in a Jain monastery by Shrimad Vijayanandsurishwar, also called Muni Atmaramaji, whom he represented at the Chicago Parliament—as with the fundamentals of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. He was well versed in history, philosophy, psychology, science, and mysticism, and quoted profusely from scholarly works. He could address large audiences with rare confidence and speak sometime for hours elaborating on a subject. Just as Swami Vivekananda founded the Vedanta Society of New York and the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Anagarika Dharmapala, the Maha Bodhi Society of America, Virchand founded three institutions in America—the Gandhi Philosophical Society, the School of Oriental Philosophy, and the Society for the Education of Women of India.

Virchand synergised in him, the erudition of Protap Chunder Mozoomdar (1840–1905), the sobriety of Hewavitarne Dharmapala (1864–1933), the philosophical outlook of G N Chakravarti, the sensitivity of Balwant Bhau Nagarkar (1858–1926), and the patriotic zeal and prophetic vision of Swami Vivekananda—all of whom represented their respective faiths at the World's first Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893.



Virchand Raghavji Gandhi

### At the Parliament of Religions

Virchand Raghavji Gandhi created a great impression on the Chicago Parliament by his refined manners, vast learning, and command of English. Although, in physical appearance, he was not as handsome as Swami Vivekananda, his tranquil and austere figure in an immaculate *kurta*—upper garment—white shawl over the shoulders and traditional turban with golden border, his friendly disposition and gentle smile attracted one and all. His opening and closing

addresses on 11 and 27 September, presentation on Jainism on 25 September, and his off-the-cuff observations during discussions, were greatly appreciated.<sup>2</sup> He delineated intricate philosophical points through metaphors, narratives, fables, and quotes. In interactive and representational arguments he was no less eloquent in the Parliament than Swami Vivekananda, Hewavitarne Dharmapala, Balwant Bhau Nagarkar, or Narasimhachari, but he never used raw rhetoric to overawe his opponents. While presenting counterview or censuring the illiberal, he did not cross the limits of decency, and thereby won the respect of all. The American press lauded his simplicity, scholarship, non-sectarian outlook, and breadth of vision. The Boston Evening Transcript dated 30 September 1893, wrote: 'He has a refined and intellectual countenance, a bright eye and something in his manner that suggests cosmopolitan influences.'<sup>3</sup>

When evangelist George T Pentecost of London concluded his address on 24 September 1893 by saying that 'There are two or three Oriental



bubbles which have been floating over Chicago for the last two or three weeks which need to be pricked'<sup>4</sup> alluding to Swami Vivekananda, H Dharmapala, Narasimhachari, and other delegates from India, it was Virchand Raghavji Gandhi, who gave a befitting reply that 'the Oriental bubbles might yet be found heavier than certain bloated balloons of self-conceit which were temporarily obscuring a large portion of the horizon' (ibid.). The Chicago Daily Tribune dated 26 September 1893 reported that the audience was sympathetic, and 'applauded loudly almost every point he scored' (ibid.).

### Exponent of Jainism

Jainism is an outlook of life, a mode of understanding the world, a way to the efflorescence of the soul, as well as a living faith. In its classical mould, the word 'Jain' is more of an adjective than a noun, as it derives from the word *jina* which means one who has conquered himself. The history of Jainism is very ancient. Its historical evolution, like that of other faiths, has been the result of interactions between a number of factors, forces, ideas, and puissant souls, sometimes between parallel or even rival schools of thought. The supreme truths in the Jain faith were revealed to the twenty-four *tirthankaras*—ford-finders—'those who help one to cross the ocean of worldly existence', at different stages of man's evolution. Deriving from the *śhrāmana*, self-reliant, tradition which is many millennia old, Jainism focuses on the purification, elevation, and flowering of the human being—an idea which is close to the *Mundaka Upanishad*,<sup>5</sup> which says that true knowledge comes not through pedagogy but through experience.

While Hermann Jacobi (788–820 CE) introduced Jainism to the West through his translation of a few Jain classical texts into German and English, Virchand may be called the first able

exponent of Jainism in America and Europe, who spread its aroma through his insightful talks, discourses, and writings. He presented Jainism as an ethico-metaphysical system which lays down that moral power is superior to physical power; renunciation is not escapism but the way to infinite purity and infinite bliss; self-sacrifice is better than self-aggrandisement. He believed that Jainism is fit to be a world religion because it stands for spirituality and culture not dogma. Jain ethics aim at the cultivation of the mind, the heart, and the soul along the lines of truth, non-violence, and righteousness, so as to turn hatred into love, love into compassion, and compassion into social service. The three jewels of Jainism, *tri-ratna*, namely, right faith, *samyaka shraddha*; right knowledge, *samyaka jnana*; and right conduct, *samyaka acharana*, underline the need for the establishment of moral law in society. Jainism rejects the atheistic and materialistic perceptions of the Charvaka school of Indian philosophy since it believes that the goal of human life is not to attain pleasure but to be perfect in every respect.

(To be concluded)

### Notes and References

1. See *The Jain Philosophy, Speeches and Writings of Virchand R. Gandhi*, ed. Kumarpal Desai (Mumbai: World Jain Confederation, 2009), 105–7, 271–6.
2. See Neely's *History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition*, ed. Walter R Houghton (Chicago and New York: F Tennyson Neely, 1894), 61–2, 853–4, 732–6.
3. <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=sArNgO4T4MoC&dat=18930930&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>> accessed 31 December 2014.
4. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 September 1893, 9 <<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1893/09/26/page/9/>> accessed 31 December 2014.
5. See *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.5.
6. Neely's *History of the Parliament of Religions*, 62.

# Memory

**Swami Satyamayananda**

(Continued from the November 2014 issue)

**I**N THE PROCESS OF RETRIEVING a memory or forming a new idea, we resort to particular behaviours, which reveal the representational system we are accessing at a given moment.<sup>1</sup>

The human being is more psychological than rational. Emotions are seen to dominate all aspects of life, even markedly influencing reason. Both reason and emotions are just modes of the mind. Generally, people take the mind for granted without seeking to know its nature. Humankind is subduing external nature, building civilizations, exploring deep space, unraveling the mystery of time, and searching the heart of matter—all because of a superior mind. This mind will lead humankind to greater heights in the future. Along with this, paradoxically, human beings can and do reduce themselves to the level of beasts. All the vileness in individual lives and human society can be traced to the erroneous uses of the mind. In the West, there has raged a debate about the nature of mind. The Indo-Aryans in India, on the other hand, had little ambiguity regarding this question. In the *Nasadiya Sukta* and the *Purusha Sukta*, two ancient hymns of the Rig Veda and the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* respectively, creation is described with a clear reference to the mind, its hierarchy, nature, and source. Besides these two, there are innumerable passages to be found in the Vedas and subsequent *Puranas*, *Darshanas*, *Sutras*, and *tantras*. One thing can be said with certainty that the Hindus had studied the mind thoroughly. But the mind has so many aspects, so many modes

in which it operates in, that not every orthodox and unorthodox philosophical system was ever in total agreement. Looking cumulatively with a discerning eye at these systems and Buddhism and Jainism gives a wealth of data from different levels and from different standpoints.

For all practical purposes, to have a correct perspective of what memory is, one should know what mind is. Mind, apart from memory, also encompasses sensory perception, volition, character, dreams, unconscious urges, abstract thoughts, thinking in mathematical symbols, and beliefs. To make a broad generalisation, in the West, theories of mind either fall into a) The mind is material; or b) The mind is immaterial. The word immaterial was and is used instead of spirit, mind, self, and soul. Thus the word ‘immaterial’ gave rise to much confusion. Rene Descartes (1596–1650) who put forward dualism, which the rest followed, stated that both mind and matter are separate entities and that they interacted in a particular locus deep in the brain, in the pineal gland. The theory of Epiphenomenalism states that the mind throws its shadow on the body and vice versa. There are philosophers who say that what exists is only the mind, matter is a myth, which quantum physics now shows, and everything was made of mind-stuff. Though Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1757) spoke of Idealism, he agreed that there were different minds; his philosophy went by the name Subjective Idealism. Doctrines derived from some German philosophers showed Absolute

Idealism. Then there were others who said that both matter and mind are not fundamental but products of a higher reality, Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77) called it God. Spinoza's 'God' is not in the Judeo-Christian conventional sense but an all-pervading order underlying the universe.

Study of the mind and mental phenomena was purely a philosopher's domain till neurology, physiology, psychology, biofeedback, medicine, advanced scanning, and measuring instruments reared their heads. With little to speculate on, philosophers of the mind now try to integrate these findings and relate them for coherence. Science today, with its forceful language says that the mind is nothing but a derivative of neural or biological processes. This outlook is not new, the *Lokayatas* or *Charvakas*, the thoroughgoing ancient Indian materialists, used to say the same thing, only differently. To illustrate: betel leaf, betel nut, lime, and other spices when chewed together exude a red colour. The red colour is not pre-existing in the ingredients but arises when mixed and chewed together. Similarly, mind, soul, or spirit is an illusion. Another well-known example the *Charvakas* give is: when molasses is fermented, the fermentation produces liquor. They also added that reality is only that which can be perceived, all else is a figment of imagination. They of course couldn't defend their arguments philosophically and the other schools hacked down their doctrines mercilessly. The modern human being has resurrected some of these beastly *Charvaka*—*Charu vakya*, beautiful speech—ideas with new terminology. Nevertheless, in every age, there have been an excess of such people. Though Vedanta and some orthodox philosophies state that mind is matter, yet the concept is unlike the ancient or modern materialists who identify it with brain matter. The mind itself was derived from a higher and subtler material entity called *akasha*. In Vedanta,

mind, *manas*, is just a part of the subtle body, *sukshma sharira*. The subtle body is composed of *manas*, mind, *buddhi*, intellect, *chitta*, memory, and *ahamkara*, ego. This *sukshma sharira* acts on the whole *sthula sharira*, gross body. An echo of this is also found in Greek literature, Anaxagoras (500–428 BCE), an Anatolian philosopher, said *Nous*, mind, was made of pure matter and it guided and controlled gross matter. This idea was also taken up by Plato and later the Roman philosopher Plotinus (204–270 CE). It won't be out of place to mention here that the Greek concept

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**Memory is directly connected with learning and knowledge. To understand memory is to understand mind.**

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of *Nous* was actually absorbed distortedly from Indian influences as mentioned by Archibald E Gough in *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, 'concept of the *Nous* is similar to the Vedantic concept of *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman* of the *Upanishads*.'<sup>2</sup> In the Upanishads, Ishvara is the sum total of all souls and is naturally higher than *Nous*.

### **The Web-like Structure of Memory**

A person may have a phenomenal memory and another just its opposite, yet both, including those in between, are ignorant of its operations. Memory is directly connected with learning and knowledge. To understand memory is to understand the mind. But the mind is tailored in such a way that we externalize it and hence can understand things only which are gross and which work under laws of causation—physical, mechanical, and chemical. Science naturally studies this causation principle to understand the mind. Watching a picture of Sri Ramakrishna for a few moments one becomes aware of another train of thought, then another leading to yet another, till one completely forgets watching Sri Ramakrishna. Where

and how did these arise? It is said that each impression is linked to one another like a web; otherwise one would not be able to associate one thought with another. It is also said that not just one web-like memory structure exists but many, all linked and interacting. It is a 'mind-boggling' labyrinth. If thoughts arise from the subconscious then it is reasonable to say that the subconscious, which lies beyond the purview of what is objective and observable, does not heed known laws. The mind has its own laws. Today, the greatest problem lies in understanding consciousness.

Long before Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) could present the subconscious mind and its workings, some philosophers indirectly spoke of it. The seventeenth-century German philosopher, G W Leibnitz, spoke of 'petites perceptions', small perceptions that go unnoticed. Leibnitz restricted

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**Memory is a 'mind-boggling' labyrinth. Mind has its own laws. Today, the greatest problem lies in understanding consciousness.**

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this phenomenon only to perception. Petites perceptions are nothing but subliminal perceptions. These occur to everyone, at all times but one is unaware of them as they are below the threshold of consciousness. All of us have experienced the sensation of being watched from a distance and even when the observer is out of the line of vision. This feeling, a kind of perception, can also tell whether the observer is friendly, unfriendly, or dangerous. The observer may be a human, animal, or bird. Sensitive persons *feel* other minds directly without visible body language or facial signs. This is different from reading what is called micro-expressions—intense bursts of emotions lasting only for a fraction of a second—and pattern recognition that cannot be read by the senses but by intuition and which is invariably unerring. A garbage collector will, in a few weeks, not react

to the malodorous garbage, though the olfactory organ, fatigued from constant stimulation, brings in the sensations. The conscious mind has simply ignored them. A person sitting to meditate close up in front of a wall and being overcome by torpor will stay sitting cross-legged but the body will go flaccid and keep swaying. The head will move dangerously close to the wall and pull back at the last instant before it can bump against it. This moving back and forth can go on even for hours. After the person snaps awake, there is no memory of what had transpired. A baby's whimper at night shall awaken its mother. In all these cases, perception is present but not in the conscious mind. It is subliminally recorded and responded to.

Sixth sense or intuition is the same subliminal perception. Its importance warrants a little more explanation. Generally people dismiss this phenomenon as lucky guesses, inexplicable flashes of insight, gut feelings, animal instincts, and, extra-sensory perception (ESP). Today, cognitive psychologists themselves are taking a look at this fact instead of dismissing it outright as nonsense. They need to, because it cannot be dismissed any more. This phenomenon is a prompt from the subconscious. This is not Freud's unconscious, full of repressed memories, primitive emotions, and drives. The sixth sense arises from the 'adaptive unconscious'; it processes information, sorts it, infers causes, judges people, and influences feelings and behaviour—all without conscious awareness. It is through this that we perceive what is not visible and which the rational mind dismisses as fraud.

### ***The Definition and Working of Memory***

The capacity to reduplicate an original stimulus correctly or partially is called memory. This will naturally posit a retrieval system. The retrieval system cannot work without being cued. Cueing can be either from an external stimulus or internal stimulus in the form of other memories.



Cues can come from the very object, which gave its original impression and its replicas anywhere. An impression can also be cued by something even partly similar to the original object. For example: 'Once, Chaitanya deva was passing through a village. Someone told him that the body of the drum used in the kirtan was made from the earth of that village, and at once he went into ecstasy.'<sup>3</sup> Another example is that the memory of a wristwatch is linked to telling time, appointments, tasks, and as an ornament. Depending on the state of mind, memory of a wristwatch as an ornament is held in the background when the mind is more interested in time. When the mind is interested in the watch, memory regarding time and appointments fall in the background; no impression stands isolated.

There are three distinct processes: input, retention, and recall. The first two are learning processes and the last is memory proper. Memory can also be called the process by which experiences are coded, stored, and decoded for use. This capacity varies from person to person, from one time to another, from one place and circumstance to another. Semantic memory can be reduplicated exactly as it was learnt but the same cannot be said for other types. Technically, memory can never duplicate an original stimulus perfectly, for recall involves a part of the mind not necessarily the same as that into which an input was registered and stored. The mind being dynamic it forms patterns and re-patterns with memory.

As a sensation enters the mind, the latter reacts. 'Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.' Each reaction depends on two things: the quality of the mind at that moment, its fatigue, receptivity distraction, and emotional state, and on the mind's current contents—the conscious and pre-conscious data. Each reaction, in turn, takes two forms, one for and one against the sensation. If the sensation is unimportant to the organism, it

fades with the data itself sometimes acting like a bulwark. The fading of the impression can last from less than two seconds to two weeks. In the case of the quality of the mind and its data acting for a sensation, it is immediately co-related to pre-existing data and stored. Sometimes an immediate recall might fail but the memory may come out later under proper circumstances. This model is however an extremely simplified version. To understand the complexity a little more, another model must be used. Sensations that arrive from the outside are visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory. One of the principles the mind works on is name and form. Each form has a name and vice versa. All non-verbal sensations must find a verbal correlate phonological input, for one should be able to say what one experiences. If one is watching a tree, one doesn't hear a heavenly voice saying 'tree' at the same time. This is the second stage in which forms are yoked to names. The yoking is accomplished by a system called working or primary memory. This is the processor and consolidator within. It works by interacting with three other systems: semantic, explicit, and implicit. Each of these three types, in turn, has two divisions, recent and remote. A couple of things need to be remembered here. When sensations arrive, though separate, all of them interact with the help of the working memory. The next, the whole process is subconscious. This subconscious activity and interactions give as a final fruit, the conscious form and name of an object.

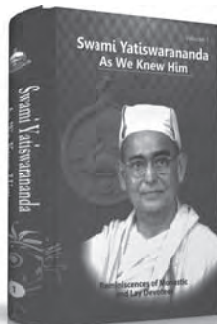
(To be continued)

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8. See Hedwig Lewis, *Body Language: A Guide for Professionals* (New Delhi: Sage, 2012), 85.
9. Swami Tathagatananda, *Journey of the Upanishads to the West* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2005), 142.
10. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 547.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **Swami Yatiswarananda As We Knew Him**

Monks and Devotees of the  
Ramakrishna Order

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,  
Chennai 600 004. Website: [www.chennai.math.org](http://www.chennai.math.org). 2014. 2 vols. with  
CD. xxviii + 1520 pp. ₹ 200. HB.  
ISBN 9788178835808.

This book presents a meticulous portrayal of Swami Yatiswarananda (1889–1966), former Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and an initiated disciple of Swami Brahmananda, spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of the Order. An eminent figure in the Neo-Vedanta Movement, Swami Yatiswarananda successfully spread the message of Vedanta in Europe for seven years and in the US for ten years. After coming back to India in 1950, he served as the head of the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Bombay, Madras, and Bangalore. In 1952, he was empowered to initiate lay devotees. His writings are replete with valuable guidance for genuine spiritual aspirants. A strict disciplinarian, he laid great stress on cleanliness. He was also known to be a tender soul and a capable spiritual advisor as he had a good understanding of human psychology. He was a source of inspiration to innumerable monastic and lay disciples both in India and abroad. As the publisher's note conveys, this book, by the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, containing sacred reminiscences of him by his disciples who came in his holy contact, is 'an earnest attempt to give an idea of the spiritual treasure and realisation enshrined in this spiritual tradition of the Ramakrishna Order' (iii). Thus this publication has been essentially an endeavour to reflect on the divine personalities of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda through the life of an illumined soul, Swami Yatiswarananda.

The brief biographical profile in the beginning of the book gives an overview of his eventful life. It also contains his reminiscences and the teachings of his guru, which he followed firmly and which moulded him. The next section includes reminiscences of monks and nuns, followed by the section on the recollections of lay devotees, men and women. While going through these sections, the reader is deeply moved by the manner, in which Swami Yatiswarananda delicately shaped the young minds, influenced people, and instilled in them the ideology of Sri Ramakrishna through his selfless love. He treated each individual in a unique way. He was always in tune with the Divine and thus set an example by living a well harmonised life, which left a strong impression on many minds. Many incidents and facts are repeated, yet these are stated and viewed in varied ways, which add to them a new aspect.

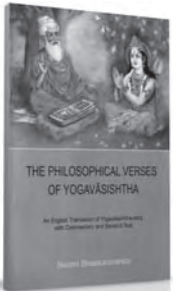
The reminiscences contributed by the devotees from abroad elucidate how instrumental he was in spreading the message of the Vedic sages when Europe was being torn apart by war. People found solace in Vedanta introduced to them by him. In India, the devotees' memories describing his fifteen years as the President of the Ramakrishna Math, Basavangudi, Bangalore, illustrate that he was a great organiser as well. Under him, the Ashrama underwent tremendous changes. Few of them being the construction and consecration of the new temple, the setting up of Vivekananda Balaka Sangha—where young boys are trained physically, mentally, intellectually, and spiritually so that they can lead meaningful lives—the building of a good students' home, and so on. He also encouraged his women disciples to be self-sufficient and establish themselves deeply in spiritual life and thus played a major role in moulding their lives. He developed the Ashrama as a place for spiritual solace.

The section containing 'Letters and Prayers' was originally a book published in 1969 consisting

compilations from his letters. He himself compiled them choosing such portions of the letters which would be useful to sincere spiritual seekers. In this section, he has clearly explained the various stages in God realisation and solutions to the frequent problems faced in this path. This section is followed by his letters to devotees and a few personal letters. While going through the letters, one realises how the tender heart of a great soul responds to the needs of each individual. He tried his best to provide solutions to the worldly problems of his disciples. He had a motherly love for all. The last section comprises his stray writings and reports. In the three appendices, the heart touching reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna by one of his householder disciples, named Bhavatarini—translated by Swami Yatiswarananda from Bengali to English—is worth mention.

This book contains numerous pictures, mostly of Swami Yatiswarananda in Western attire. Like Swami Vivekananda, he also used Western clothes while in the US and Europe, which helped him to blend with people instead of being a curio. The CD provided with the book contains the recordings of his lectures delivered at various places which provide an idea of his style of speaking and voice. Some of the recordings are not clear, yet hearing in his voice, spiritual instructions and chanting produces a great impression on the mind of the listener. Swami Yatiswarananda's life represents all that the ancient scriptures stand for, and this book will surely provide a glimpse of this ancient wisdom and be an elevating experience to the readers.

Nandini Das  
Kolkata



### **The Philosophical Verses of Yogavasistha**

Trans. Swami Bhaskarananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004, Website: [www.chennaiamath.org](http://www.chennaiamath.org). viii + 92 pp. ₹ 35. PB. ISBN 9788178235325.

The cover picture shows Brahmarishi Vashistha and Sri Ramachandra in a hermitage. The greatest of the brahmana sages, his right fingers showing a mudra, is teaching the greatest of the

kshatriyas, venerated as an avatar, who is sitting before him with joined palms. Two of the most superb minds the world has ever seen, minds purified from all the dross of worldliness, discuss the grand and sublime principles of Advaita Vedanta. These two personalities also have served as the nucleus from where grew the best of Hinduism.

The *Yogavasistha Ramayana*, the outcome of the discussion between these two personalities, comprises thirty-two thousand verses. In the ninth century a Kashmiri pandit Abhinanda Gaur gleaned six thousand verses from it to make the *Laghu Yogavasistha*. Selecting the best of the original, another unknown pandit created in two hundred and thirty-three verses the *Yogavasisthasara*.

This book is the English translation of *Yogavasisthasara*, by Swami Bhaskarananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Western Washington.

To the uninitiated in the principles of Advaita Vedanta the book may appear blasphemous. To the initiated, it is a source of joy. And all those anywhere in between will be awestruck by these daring, deep, and uncompromising thoughts on the Truth. Advaita Vedanta invites one to rise even beyond the most sublime supernal visions. The sages of old plunged into the great unknown and then made it 'more than known'. Besides, these sages have organised their thoughts to create an institution out of them, so that the ideals of Vedanta could become the property of all.

The ten chapters of the book deal with the core of Advaita Vedanta. This is a lucid translation and has embellished it with explanatory notes that follow the Mahidhara commentary. In the original there are stories within stories, within stories, that are delightful. The present compilation dispenses with those stories, but instead injects the strong antidote of Brahmaavidya, knowledge of Brahman, intravenously, as it were, to counter the venom of worldliness that circulates in our system.

The entire text in Sanskrit is given in an appendix, and a small glossary closes this booklet. Published in a handy softcover and priced affordably, it is expected to reach the ever widening circle of Advaita Vedanta enthusiasts.

Swami Satyamayananda

Secretary,

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur

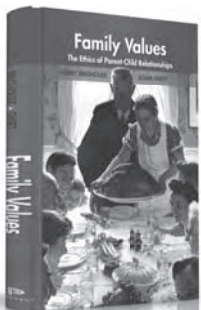
**Beyond Sacred Violence:  
A Comparative Study of  
Sacrifice**

Kathryn McClymond

The John Hopkins University Press,  
2715 North Charles Street, Baltimore,  
Maryland 21218-4363, USA. Website:  
[www.press.jhu.edu](http://www.press.jhu.edu). 2008. xii + 216 pp.  
\$ 57. HB. ISBN 9780801887765.

Imagine the face of a Westerner recoiling in repugnance hearing from a Hindu of a 'sacrifice' coming up in home. Images of gory killings and bloody entrails coming out of animals and even humans, haunts the Westerner, who does not even bother to check up the Hindu meaning of 'sacrifice'. Kathryn McClymond urges the reader to come out of this reductionist understanding of sacrifice or *yajna*, which has a broad meaning, widely different from its Semitic concept. Comparing Vedic and Jewish sacrifices, she shows how *yajna* was synonymous with the entire life, both of the individual and of the universe. Quoting extensively from the scriptures of both the traditions, she gives an authoritative evidence of the needless Western colouring of Eastern religious practices. This book is also a call to situate Eastern religious traditions in their own framework, not borrowing from Western scholarly paradigms and also not being apologetic to the Western ideas of life, religion, and the beyond. Written in an engaging and informative style, this book would be interesting to both scholars and ordinary readers.

PB



**Family Values**

Harry Brighthouse and Adam Swift

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, USA. Website: [www.press.princeton.edu](http://www.press.princeton.edu). 2014. xx + 216 pp. \$ 35. HB. ISBN 9780691126913.

Spare the rod and spoil the child was the old adage, but now you could end up in jail for using a rod! Increasing media intrusion and excessive unnecessary human-right championing

has made us lose the domains of our families to different societal agencies including law. How does a parent bring up a child in such a society? The authors, from backgrounds of education and political science, stress on the value of family and also the freedom of a parent in raising children. Intimate family relations can never be substituted by the protection of social agencies. This book is at once a work of political science and family relationships. Where and how does politics intrude the family? Investigating the changing nature of various traditional constructs of family, parent, and children, the authors have remarkably brought out a timely work questioning the resignation to collective institutional child-rearing.

The authors definitely become the voice of countless parents when they say: 'Healthy family life requires parents to enjoy a good deal of discretion over their children's lives and to be experienced by their children as exercising authoritative judgments in many areas. ... But parents cannot exercise that discretion and enjoy that unmonitored interaction without being allowed the space to make mistakes ... parents have no right to abuse children—but they do have a right to the space within which abuse may occur' (120). This book forces us to focus on the family, so neglected today, and emphasises its role in shaping values of future generations.

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**God Without Being**

Jean-Luc Marion

Trans. Thomas A Carlson

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637, USA. Website: [www.press.uchicago.edu](http://www.press.uchicago.edu). 2012. xxx + 313 pp. ₹ 695. PB. ISBN 9780226505657.

Should God exist? Should God have a form, an icon, or an idol? Marion explores the possibility of a God who would not be, who would not have a being. He sees God in agape, Christian charity, or love and obviates the need for imagining or positing the existence or being of God. He thinks that the 'unthinkable forces us to substitute the idolatrous quotation marks around "God" with the very God that no mark of knowledge can demarcate,

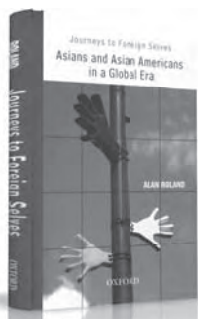


and, in order to say it' (46) he crosses the 'o' in God and continues this notation in the rest of the book. The second edition and a translation of the original French, this book is a volume in the series *Religion and Postmodernism* brought out by the University of Chicago Press. In a daring postmodern spirit, the author tries to do away with a personality of God because he is concerned that 'we manage so poorly to keep silent before that which we cannot express in a statement' (59). Attempts to express the inexpressible creates a false image of God, who exists even before actually being. It is a pity that the author rests his arguments based only on Christian scriptures and does not refer to scriptures from other religions, such as those of the East. Had he done so, he would have come across interesting insights on God without being in those texts. With elaborate notes and references to major thinkers on religion and theology, this book is a profound study on the perception of God with an identity.

PB

and mystical traditions of the East and how over and again psychologists have resorted to a 'very pathologizing and regressive analysis of spiritual aspirations and experiences' (121). He questions as to 'what extent primary-process thinking and the id constitute spiritual knowing' (122). He locates 'spiritual longings' to 'follow from an appreciation of issues of the self, especially a self driven by intense spiritual yearnings, rather than seeing all motivation as deriving from unconscious psychic conflict ... anxiety and depression' (125). Roland's vast clinical experience and his deep insight makes this volume an appealing read to all concerned with the modern human mind.

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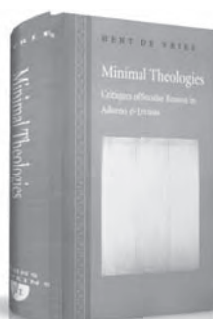


### ***Journey to Foreign Selves***

Alan Roland

Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, 1 Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001. Website: [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com). 2011. x + 250 pp. ₹ 695. HB. ISBN 9780198069461.

Do people change when they are in a cultural setting other than their own? This century has witnessed inter-culture movements like never before. That has had its share of psychological imbalance. Roland does an excellent job of locating the psychology of the selves at the familial, cultural, and individual levels in a changing cultural backdrop. Drawing from the results of various case studies conducted in India, Japan, China, Korea, and New York, he focuses on the cultural interplay of Asian and American individualities. This century has also witnessed barbarous acts of terrorism. Taking the partition of India and Pakistan and the 9/11 tragedy as his points of departure, Roland traces the trauma and dissociation these events entailed. He also shows us how the Western understanding of psychology has clouded and hindered a true assessment of the spiritual



### ***Minimal Theologies***

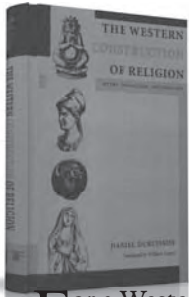
Hent de Vries

Trans. Geoffrey Hale

The John Hopkins University Press, 2005. xxxvi + 720 pp. \$ 71. PB. ISBN 9780801880179.

Much like its size, this book has a huge task to perform: critiquing secular reason in the thoughts of Theodor Adorno and Emmanuel Levinas. That the author deftly does that is another credit to his immense scholarship. The preface to the translation, which is also a revised edition, distanced from its German original by more than fifteen years, updates the reader with the huge corpus of literature of both the thinkers published since. The author places this book as the last of a trilogy of which his *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* and *Religion and Violence* are the first two. In a fresh approach to religious philosophy, de Vries brings to us the similarities in the thoughts of Adorno and Levinas, and shows us how taken together, they have much deeper impact, than considered separately. That the author discussed this book with Emmanuel Levinas in person adds authenticity to the work. Avowedly a critique of negative dialectics, this volume offers an original exploration of the interactions of philosophy and religion, and is a must read for those interested in theology, critical theory, deconstruction, and dialectics.

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### ***The Western Construction of Religion***

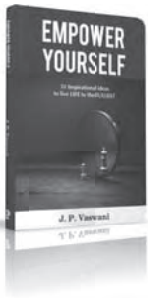
Daniel Dubuisson.  
Trans. William Sayers.

The John Hopkins University Press.  
2003. xii + 244 pp. \$ 29. PB. ISBN  
9780801887567.

For a Westerner usually religion is a choice, for most from the East, it is life itself. The objectification of religion led the West to venture into its scientific study, like the study of any other discipline like engineering. The subjectivity of religion led the East to focus more on the precepts being lived, rather than being restricted to intellectual analysis. With the coming together of nations and blurring of boundaries, the followers of different religions started interacting. To the Westerner, most of the religious wisdom of the East was cryptic and inaccessible, in a language and context far removed. This led to the imposing of Western notions of religion on the East. This book, a translation of the French original, attempts to remove wrong understandings of non-Western concepts of religion and also tries to provide a reassessment of the history of religion as understood in the West. The author charts out a path to a better understanding of world religions by pointing out that every religion has its own sociological and anthropological basis and that all 'cultures are thereby similar, and likewise, all are different' (201). He stresses that all human cultural and religious worlds are nothing but different worlds made indispensable and in the human imagination, each such world has its rightful place.

PB

## **BOOKS RECEIVED**



### ***Empower Yourself***

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House, Sadhu Vaswani Mission, 10, Sadhu Vaswani Path, Pune 411 001. Website: [www.dadavaswanibooks.org](http://www.dadavaswanibooks.org). 192 pp. ₹ 150. PB. ISBN 9789380743677.



### ***The Endless Quest***

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House. 136 pp. ₹ 195. PB. ISBN 9789380743837.



### ***Stay Connected***

J P Vaswani

Gita Publishing House. 128 pp. ₹ 195. PB. ISBN 9789380743820.



### ***Value of Brahmacharya***

Swami Tathagatananda

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore.  
38 pp. ₹ 20. PB. ISBN 9788178835747.



### ***Universal Prayers for Youth***

Compiled and Ed. by

Swami Atmashraddhananda

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore.  
44 pp. ₹ 25. PB. ISBN 9788178835662.



### ***Living Imprints of Indian Culture***

Compiled and Ed. by

Swami Atmashraddhananda

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore.  
102 pp. ₹ 30. PB. ISBN 9788178835778.

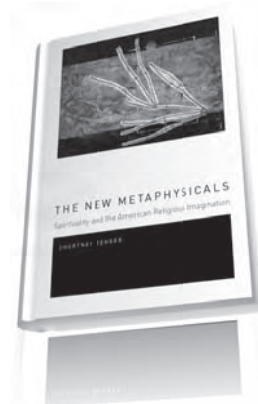
# MANANA

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## ***The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and American Religious Imagination***

Courtney Bender

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637, USA.  
2010. x + 254 pp. \$ 81. HB. ISBN 9780226042794.



This is a book about the central presence of individual religious experience in American spiritual cultures and practice. *The New Metaphysicals* considers how particular cultural, theological, and even scientific legacies make experiencing and touching the divine possible. Religious experiences were a central lingua franca for Cambridge's spiritual practitioners. Numinous, unexpected experiences, mystical experiences of "flow," and daily synchronicities, dreams, and the like shaped the worlds in which spiritual practitioners lived. Their stories were dense with detail and presented occasions for extended, changing, and conflicting interpretations.

When mystics and spiritual practitioners met face to face, their primary focus was often on experience as well. They talked about their meanings and proper interpretation, and together pondered their authenticity. They debated whether experience could be practiced or self-initiated, and how experience changed their bodies. All the while, they worked together to elicit felicitous circumstances for future experiences and drew upon past experiences to evaluate relations with intimates and strangers. And, as they did, they likewise shaped their relations to the past in ways that refigured the traditions of which they were arguably a part. These activities signaled participation in a history that was carried in practice rather than in other forms of

memory: the pivotal importance of religious experience in these living articulations positioned practitioners within religious traditions that are indicated through arguments about how experience itself works.

While this volume focuses throughout on key issues of experience, it began with a set of questions about where (and in fact whether) spiritual identities, practices, and discourses are produced in similar ways to other religious identities, practices, and discourses. I wanted to know how and where people became "spiritual not religious," and what kinds of structures supported their narratives and practices. I thus ventured into an ethnographic study of spirituality in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the goal of developing a working map of various spiritual practitioners and networks by observing as many settings and interviewing as many leaders and participants as possible. Locating my study in Cambridge thus demanded that I think about the location of contemporary spirituality not just in organizational terms but also in geographical and historical terms.

How is a tradition felt and carried when its very practice and theology claim a different reading of history and the past than what we generally understand to be carried in traditions? How do practices central to metaphysical and mystical traditions work within the stories that both practitioners and scholars tell about spirituality?

While Cambridge's role in answering these questions is particular and peculiar, it is not my intent to restore a forgotten historical narrative to either "spirituality" or "Cambridge." Rather, it is to use both within an inquiry about how forgetting and remembering are linked to practices of various kinds, including practices of experiencing, writing, reading, and speaking.

Defining spirituality and locating it within social life is notoriously difficult. Much like religion or experience, spirituality is bedeviled not by a lack of definitions but by an almost endless proliferation of them. Most definitions—including those that are historical or genealogical, as well as those that are psychological, perennial, or neurological—have served to protect, defend, debunk, or claim certain territory for the spiritual; these definitions confound more than they illuminate. But most of these distinctions, particularly those that describe spirituality as a category distinct from religion, are relatively new. Spirituality, whatever it is and however it is defined, is *entangled* in social life, in history, and in our academic and nonacademic imaginations. Extracting spirituality or mysticism from the institutions where it is lived out both distorts and mischaracterizes the phenomenon, and draws attention away from the conundrums it poses and the possibilities it allows. Spiritual forms have thrived and been shaped by entanglements with the secular, including its powerful engagements with modern science and progress.

In addition to using the term "spiritual practitioner" to talk about the people I met in Cambridge, I also call them "metaphysicals" and "mystics" to call attention to the ways their practices are centrally engaged with and entangled in specific American religious trajectories. It is precisely the individual, abnormal type of religious experience, which has developed within a long set of interactions among sociology, philosophy,

hermeneutics, and theology, that provides a space for sociologically meaningful "religious individualism" to emerge and take (changing but definite) shape as a category of religious expression; and it is precisely these conversations that we must investigate before analyzing Americans' spiritual expression.

Contemporary understandings of religion, religious experience, and spirituality are not only "studied by" historians and sociologists, they are also forged in ongoing interactions between groups of scholars and laypeople. Religious actors and groups actively laid claim to the findings of social scientists and experimentalists, sometimes adapting scholarly research for their own purposes. My respondents recognized me as a professor and researcher. What they understood that researchers did however, particularly within the orbits of metaphysical networks, was highly inflected by the books they read, the institutions they engaged, and the practices embedded within contemporary spirituality. Depicting metaphysicals as people without a past suggests that the cultures that metaphysicals are connected to do not strongly shape them nor demand much from them. There are no witches or bewitched. But as my own and others' engagements with spiritual and metaphysical practitioners make evident, there are in fact cultures that catch people in relations to each other.

Sociologists might come to better engage American religions in all of their breadth and scope by identifying the varying genealogies of religious experience that recombine within it. Such an analytical project will undoubtedly require thoughtful engagement with the contributing role of social scientific evaluations of religious experience, both in sociology's understanding of religion's place in modern society and (to a lesser degree) in spiritual practitioners' self-understandings.





# REPORTS

## News of Branch Centres

**Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong** has been conferred Youth and Education Award 2014 by Christ School International and Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures, both organisations based in Shillong. The award, comprising a certificate and a sum of 25,000 rupees, given in recognition of the centre's excellent service in north-east India, was handed over by Sri K K Paul, Governor of Meghalaya, on 6 December 2014. The staff quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai** was inaugurated on 10 December. Srmat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for the proposed dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Math (Yogodyan), Kankurgachhi** on 14 December. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the building, housing a workshop and classrooms, at Janashiksha Mandir of **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur**, on 16 December. As a part of its platinum jubilee celebrations, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Visakhapatnam** conducted a youth convention on 19 December attended by 1,500 youths, and a state-level devotees' convention from 19 to 21 December attended by about 70 monastics and 3,000 devotees. **Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar** has been awarded Swami Vivekananda SREI Samman Award 2014 by SREI Foundation, Kolkata. The award comprising a memento and a purse of 50,000 rupees was handed over by Sri Keshari Nath Tripathi, Governor of West Bengal, on 28 December. **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai** held a function on 30 December to commemorate the centenary of the publication of *The Vedanta Kesari*, the English



*Sri Ramakrishna Temple Consecration at Chittagong*

monthly journal brought out by the centre since 1914. A DVD containing digitised versions of 101 years of the magazine was released on the occasion. Also, a special issue of the magazine focusing on 'Spirituality Today' was published. More than 300 people attended the function. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body under University Grants Commission (UGC), has awarded 'A' grade to our **Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara**.

Srmat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the Sri Ramakrishna Temple at **Ramakrishana Sevashrama, Chittagong (Bangladesh)** on 30 November, the sacred birthday of Swami Premanandaji Maharaj. Special worship and homa, procession, public meetings, and cultural programmes were held as part of the five-day programme from 29 November to 3 December. Swami Prabhanandaji, Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed, Minister of Land, Government of Bangladesh, and Sri Pankaj Saran, High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, among others addressed the public meetings. In all, 66 monastics and about 5,000 devotees attended the programme.

## Relief

**Hudhud Cyclone Relief • Andhra Pradesh:** **Visakhapatnam** centre distributed 150 kg sugar, 300 packets of biscuits, 30 assorted utensils, 50 school bags, and 100 notebooks among the afflicted people in October. The centre also distributed 1,852 blankets and 941 solar lanterns among 941 families belonging to 10 areas of Srikakulam,

West Godavari, and Visakhapatnam districts from 28 to 30 November.

**Flood Relief • India: Jammu & Kashmir:** Continuing its relief work among the people affected by flash floods and landslides in the state, **Jammu** centre distributed 1,000 corrugated sheets, 200 iron pipes, 20 feet each, 25 blankets, 25 shawls, 25 jackets, and 25 sets of utensils among 50 families belonging to 7 villages of Jammu district on 29 and 30 December. **Uttarakhand: Dehradun** centre continued its relief work in Chamoli and Rudrapur districts. The centre distributed 22,200 kg rice, 4,240 kg dal, 4,240 l edible oil, 1,696 kg salt, 200 blankets, 45 sleeping bags, 70 jackets, 450 sweaters, 140 solar lanterns, 8,968 notebooks, and 3,000 school bags among 888 families of 14 villages from August to October. **Sri Lanka:** Following severe floods caused by unprecedented rains, **Batticaloa sub-centre of Colombo Ashrama** distributed 710 kg rice, 106 kg dal, 106 kg sugar, and 142 matchboxes among 71 families in Vavunatheevu area of Batticaloa district in December. Further, 45 kg rice, 13 kg dal, 9 kg milk powder, 13 kg sugar, and 18 kg flour were provided to 9 families living in the vicinity of the Ashrama.

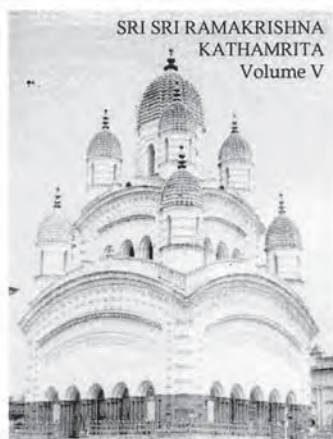
**Distress Relief •** The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: **Belgharia:** 275 saris, 216 dhotis, 782 lungis, 307 shirts, 50 pants, and 302 frocks from October to December. **Chapra:** 200 saris, 200 dhotis, 243 wrappers, 112 adult garments, 127 children's garments, and 12 bed-sheets from 27 October to 10 November. **Cherrapunji:** 220 saris from 8 November to 27 December. **Gadadhar Ashrama:** 172 saris and 46 assorted garments in November and December. **Ghatshila:** 200 saris and 200 dhotis from 15 to 25 September. **Gourhati:** 100 saris and 100 dhotis from 2 October to 2 December. **Kadapa:** 125 saris on 13 December. **Karimganj:** 250 dhotis on 11 December. **Taki:** 150 saris and 120 mosquito-nets from 8 August to 15 December. **Vrindaban:** 1,500 dhotis, 1,500 pairs of socks, 1,500 bottles of body oil, and 3,000 soap-bars on 13 December.

**Winter Relief •** The following centres distributed blankets to poor people: **India: Baghbazar, Kolkata:** 250 on 8 and 9 December; **Baranagar Mission, Kolkata:** 250 from 28 August to 30

November; **Barasat, Kolkata:** 250 from 1 April to 15 December; **Belgharia, Kolkata:** 600 from October to December; **Bhopal:** 150 on 22 November; **Bhubaneshwar:** 204 from 28 November to 23 December; **Chandigarh:** 270 from 17 November to 10 December; **Chapra:** 1,250 from 10 to 19 December; **Cherrapunji:** 1,973 from 8 November to 27 December; **Contai:** 250 on 25 November; **Cossipore, Kolkata:** 250 from 25 November to 7 December; **Delhi:** 785 from 16 to 25 December; **Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata:** 20 in November and December; **Ghatshila:** 250 from 25 November to 4 December; **Gourhati:** 350 from 2 October to 2 December; **Indore:** 250 on 21 December; **Jaipur:** 250 from 2 to 4 December; **Kamarpukur:** 1,900 from 5 November to 26 December; **Karimganj:** 250 on 11 December; **Khetri:** 55 on 28 December; **Nagpur:** 170 on 20 and 22 December; **Narendrapur, Kolkata:** 250 from 28 November to 6 December; **Narottam Nagar:** 250 in November and December; **Purulia:** 250 from 14 October to 10 December; **Ramharipur:** 250 from 28 October to 24 November; **Saradapitha, Belur:** 50 on 16 December; **Shillong:** 230 from 16 November to 20 December; **Sikra Kulingram:** 100 from 1 to 21 December; **Silchar:** 250 on 5 December; **Taki:** 300 from 8 August to 27 December; **Vadodara:** 30 on 11 December; **Visakhapatnam:** 200 on 13 December; **Vrindaban:** 1,500 on 13 December; **Bangladesh: Dhaka:** 2,115 in December; **Total** 15,752. Furthermore, the following centres distributed various winter garments, as shown against their names, to needy people: **Gadadhar Ashrama:** 35 sweaters in November and December. **Gourhati:** 50 wrappers from 2 October to 2 December. **Kamarpukur:** 200 jackets from 5 November to 26 December. **Khetri:** 775 sweaters on 13 December. **Narottam Nagar:** 397 sweaters in November and December.

**Economic Rehabilitation •** The following centres distributed sewing machines to needy people: **Antpur:** 123 sets of weaving accessories, 41 sewing machines, and 2 cycle-trolleys from 25 November to 14 December. **Chandipur:** 2 sewing machines on 21 November. **Khetri:** 28 sewing machines on 13 December. **Narottam Nagar:** 20 sewing machines and 34 sets of tailoring kits on 30 November.





**JUST RELEASED**

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M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta), a son of the Lord and disciple, elaborated his diaries in five parts of 'Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita' in Bengali that were first published by Kathamrita Bhawan, Calcutta in the years 1902, 1905, 1908, 1910 and 1932 respectively. This series is a verbatim translation in Hindi of the same.

- ❑ **Sri Ma Darshan** Vol. I to XVI Rs. 825 per set (plus postage Rs. 150)

In this series of sixteen volumes Swami Nityatmananda brings the reader in close touch with the life and teachings of the Ramakrishna family: Thakur, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, M., Swami Shivananda, Swami Abhedananda and others. The series brings forth elucidation of the Upanishads, the Gita, the Bible, the Holy Quran and other scriptures, by M., in accordance with Sri Ramakrishna's line of thought. This work is a commentary on the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Gospel's author himself.

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- ❑ **Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita** Vol. I to V Rs. 750.00 per set (plus postage Rs.15)  
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 (English version of Sri Ma Darshan) (plus postage Rs. 150)  
 ❑ **Life of M. and Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita** Rs. 150.00 (plus postage Rs. 50)  
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- ❑ **Sri Ma Darshan** Vol. I to XVI Rs. 1225 per set (plus postage Rs. 150)

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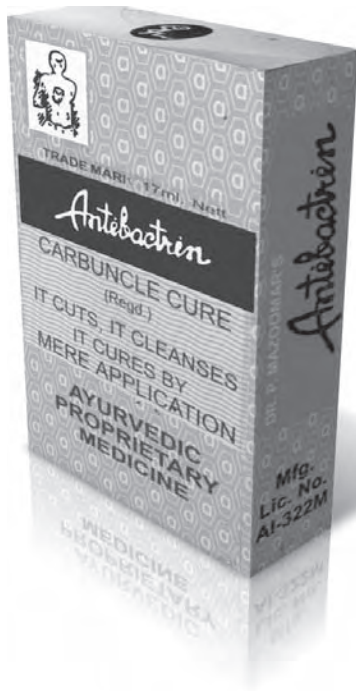
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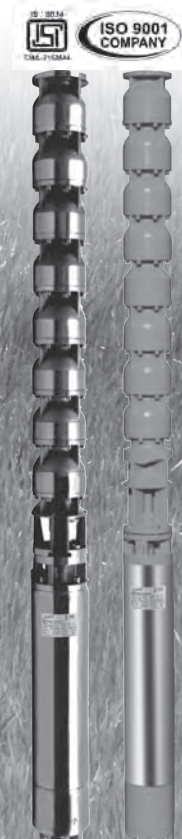
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## Synopsis of the Annual General Meeting of Ramakrishna Mission, 2013-14

The 105th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, the 21st December 2014 at 3.30 p.m.

Samaj Sevak Shikshana Mandir (Saradapitha, Belur) was adjudged the third best Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) in India under Category-II (over three years old RSETIs) by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Bharat Chamber of Commerce awarded B P Poddar Memorial Award to Lokasiksha Parishad of Narendrapur Ashrama for its contribution to environmental improvement. The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, held the closing ceremony of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 12 January 2014. The Government of West Bengal marked the conclusion of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary with a public function at Red Road, Kolkata, on 10 January 2014. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu announced the creation of higher research and education centres in the name of Swamiji in nine universities of Tamil Nadu.

The four-year-long service programmes started in different parts of the country in 2010 entered its last phase. A sum of Rs. 83.52 crore was spent on these central-government-aided service projects from 08.10.2010 to 30.06.2014. A brief report is attached herewith.

A new branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission was started at 'Roy Villa' in Darjeeling where Sister Nivedita (Margaret Elizabeth Noble) breathed her last. Outside India, a new sub-centre of Chittagong (Bangladesh) Mission centre was started at Dhorla, Bangladesh.

In educational field, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) The Vocational Training Centre run by Viveknagar (Tripura) centre was upgraded to Industrial Training Institute (ITI); (ii) Kothar (Odisha) centre started a computer training institute; (iii) Delhi centre developed a 5-module value education programme titled "Awakening" which was conducted in 50 CBSE schools in and around Delhi.

In medical field, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) Opening of Cardiac OT Complex with 5-bed Intensive Therapy Unit and addition of Advanced Phaco Emulsification Unit, Coblator II Surgery System-ENT, Fiberoptic Bronchoscope, etc in Lucknow hospital; (ii) addition of Haemodialysis Machine, UGI Video Endoscopy, Phototherapy, etc in Itanagar hospital; (iii) laying of Foundation stone for the proposed Swami Vivekananda Diagnostic and Cardiac Care Centre at Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata.

In rural development field, the following new projects deserve special mention: (i) Ranchi (Morabadi) centre constructed 181 percolation tanks under the IWMP (Integrated Watershed Management Programme), created 120 units of contour trenching, made frontline demonstration of crops like paddy, wheat, mustard, and different pulses to 1052 farmers; (ii) Narendrapur centre started two community colleges, each having capacity of 250 trainees, at Gosaba, South 24 Parganas, and Matgoda, Bankura, of West Bengal, for upgrading the skill of backward communities in 5 trades.

Under the Math, following new projects deserve special mention: (i) A computer training unit at Bagda (Purulia); (ii) addition of a five-storey building with an operation theatre at Mayavati (Uttarakhand) hospital; (iii) Dispensary buildings at Cooch Behar and Naora (West Bengal); (iv) Operating Microscope and some other ophthalmic instruments in the dispensary of Antpur centre.

Outside India, the following new developments deserve special mention: (i) Sarada Kindergarten of Singapore centre received the prestigious ECDA (Early Childhood and Development Agency) Outstanding Centre for Teaching and Learning Award 2013 and the Principal of the Kindergarten received ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award 2013 from the Ministry of Education, Singapore; (ii) Fiji centre received Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award from the Government of India for raising the prestige of India by rendering commendable community service in that country.

During the year, the Mission and Math undertook several relief and rehabilitation programmes in different

parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs. 10.86 crore, benefiting 4.15 lakh people of 1.20 lakh families.

Welfare work was done by way of providing scholarships to poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people, etc (about 28.59 lakh beneficiaries); expenditure incurred Rs. 14.74 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 83 lakh people through 15 hospitals, 111 dispensaries, 59 mobile medical units and 1255 medical camps; expenditure incurred Rs. 166.71 crore.

Nearly 3.45 lakh students were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level, non-formal education centres, night schools, coaching classes, etc. A sum of Rs.276.56 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs. 52.45 crore benefiting about 30.73 lakh rural people.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind cooperation and help.

(Swami Suhitananda)  
General Secretary

21 December 2014

**Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda: A brief progress report of the Central-Government-grant-aided service projects from 08.10.2010 to 30.06.2014:**

1. Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakaalpa (Integrated Child Development): Running 174 units in 23 states. About 18,100 children were benefited. A sum of Rs. 2459.48 lakh was spent.
  2. Vivekananda Swasthya Parisheva Prakaalpa (Health Services Project for Mothers & Children): Running 126 units in 22 states. About 13,500 mothers and children were benefited. A sum of Rs. 1689.29 lakh was spent.
  3. Sarada Palli Vikas Prakaalpa (Women Self-Empowerment): Running 10 units in 8 states. In all, 1619 women were benefited. A sum of Rs. 191.18 lakh was spent.
  4. Swami Akhandananda Seva Prakaalpa (Poverty Alleviation): Running 10 units in 6 states. Altogether 1135 people were benefited. A sum of Rs. 191.10 lakh was spent.
  5. Special Service Activities (For Professionals and Parents): Through 18 units in 11 states. Altogether 3350 people were benefited. A sum of Rs. 79.24 lakh was spent.
  6. Print Media Project : In all, 28.49 lakh copies of books were printed. They included 12.68 lakh copies on Swamiji's life and teachings in 23 Indian languages and 0.04 lakh in 2 foreign languages (German & Zulu), besides 14 lakh copies of 17 other titles on Swamiji, in 10 languages. A sum of Rs. 485.63 lakh was spent.
  7. Special Programmes for the Youth: Started 10 Youth Counseling Cells in 8 states - counselled 4860 youths; Organized 2 National Level Youth Convention – total participants 19,000; Held 5 Regional Level Youth Conventions / Camps – total participants: 11,594; Organized 14 State Level Youth Conventions / Camps – total participants: 58,324; Conducted Sustained Graded Value Education Programmes through (a) 397 units (Non-formal type) in 14 states with 17,654 students of 239 institutions; and (b) 2,692 units (Classroom-based) in 16 states with 1,20,870 students of 767 schools. A sum of Rs. 2434.14 lakh was spent.
  8. Electronic Media Project: A DVD on 'Women of India' based on the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, a Documentary Feature 'A Poet, a Man, a Monk' on Swami Vivekananda and his teachings in digital format were completed. Multimedia e-books on 'Personality Development' and 'Education according to Swami Vivekananda' were produced. A sum of Rs. 224.15 lakh was spent.
  9. Cultural Programmes Project: Organized 13 State-Level seminars on 'Religious Harmony', interfaith dialogues in 12 states, Conferences on 'Unity in Diversity' in 11 states, 5 regional programmes on tribal and folk culture, Classical Music programmes in 14 states. A sum of Rs. 529.81 lakh was spent.
- In all, a sum of Rs. 83.52 crore was spent on the above projects.



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**English Editor : Swami Satyamayananda & Shri Tirthankar Dasgupta**



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